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The Editors
FIGHTING CRIME

Abigail McCarthy
TV-MADE MYTHOLOGY

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MARCH 8, 1985

DENA SEIDEN

DIMINISHING RESOURCES, CRITICAL CHOICES

Ethics & the provision of health care

On not writing a dead letter

Making the pastoral pastoral

GORDON C. ZAHN THE EDITORS

The 'kitsch revival'

THOMAS DAY

Also: WORDS & VALUES • JOYCE CAROL OATES MOSCOW'S PRODIGALS • CHRISTIAN MATURITY • CENTRAL AMERICAN WITNESSES • THE NEW POVERTY • MERGANSERS IN THE FOG

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Correspondence

Welcome

Clearwater Beach, Fla.

To the Editors: "From Immigrants to Emigrants" [January 11] by Mary Jo Weaver made me a member of Commonweal Associates.

CONSTANCE R. MARQUARDT

Maguires' ire

Milwaukee, Wis.

To the Editors: It is no mean honor to be ordained gurus in a *Commonweal* editorial signed by Peter Steinfels [Jan. 11]. The honor is all the greater since we are pronounced big-time, Michael-Novak-sized gurus. "The Maguires are to the pro-choice movement what Michael Novak is to free enterprise." Wow! To make guru status, Michael had to work full time at an institute, pour out multiple volumes, and almost monthly encyclicals. All we had to do was write two articles each and one small pamphlet.

We could have written more on abortion, but, given the soft-minded quality of the "activists" and others who followed us in signing that "dud" of an ad in *The New York Times*, we saw no need to put out.

The ad was not just about moral absolutism on abortion; it was also a statement on the nature of conscience and decision-making, on the nature of ecumenism and church, and on religious freedom and trust of women. What would the co-deans of Catholic feminist scholarship, Rosemary Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza know about all that? What would Patty Crowley, who was on the papal commission on birth control, know about reproductive ethics? Then there were those twenty-four nuns with their nearly eight hundred years of service in religious life. Rosemary Ruether curiously called them some of "the best and the brightest in the American church." What would they know about the moral maturity of women and their right to be heard on these and other issues? What would Anthony Battaglia, author of *Toward a Reformulation of Natural Law*, know about abortion? For one thing, he doesn't even live on the East coast, and he is certainly not in the *Commonweal* curia of "eminent theologians." And so on with the other dupes who followed us in the peasants' revolt.

How we hate to slap the hand of our ordaining prelate, Peter, but even prelates can fall flat on their faces. And you did. Repeatedly, in that angry editorial. First, you *guess* about what "the moving forces" of the ad "had in mind." You do guesswork on our *real* motives and intentions. You even guess at a sinister *sensus plenior* in the text of the ad. Your guessing led to accusations that we were really out to endorse the *"status quo"* of all abortion decision-making in the world!! Your guesses were uniformly wrong and insulting. If truth, and not partisan gouging, were your purpose, you could have found the truth. When you take off after Michael Novak, you cite chapter and verse of his writings. No citations at all for us. Just vague and unsubstantiated charges. Dan has written as much on ethical method and justice theory as any moral theologian in the country. Where in all of that do you find him blessing the *"status quo"* of all reproductive choices?

Secondly, you seem unaware that the authoritative work on abortion decisions in a Christian context is not our little articles, but Beverly Harrison's *Our Right To Choose*. She, of course, is a Protestant, and you do not enter into ecumenism when the subject is abortion.

Thirdly, you ignore what we reported, that 81 theologians, (57 of them teaching in Catholic institutions) told us they could not sign out of fear of precisely what has happened. We announced this in the ad; you ignored it. Why?

Fourth, you quote brave anonymous theologians in criticism of our ad. Could you not rise to the standards of the secular press such as the *New York Times*, which will not quote negative comments without attribution? You say their reason for not signing the ad was not "out of fear." Why, then, did they fear attribution?

Fifth, your ignorance about Catholics for a Free Choice is crass, since easily correctable. Their official position is to oppose the illegalization of abortion and to support funding for poor women who make abortion decisions. Some of their members actually believe that all abortions are immoral, but agree with the position of CFFC on public policy. Even on the CFFC board, there are no two identical positions on the morality of discrete abortions.

Sixth, your approved theologians admit of direct abortion "in a narrow set of 'hard cases.' " How hard does a hard case have to be and who decides? Moral theologians — mostly men? The Vatican — all men? Could no others have input here, not even our ragtag band of signers?

Finally, every signer of the ad gave permission for the "public dissemination" of their signatures. You imply otherwise.

But, come, let us end on a happy note. You do announce a brand new policy for *Commonweal*. You say that all views on abortion "ought to be argued openly." Even in *Commonweal*? Dan tried to interest you in his article — subsequently published in *The Christian Century*. No interest. Instead, Dan was offered a chance to write a 1500-word commentary on a forthcoming piece by journalist Mary Meehan! Dan declined. One of Margie's articles was also rejected by *Commonweal* and published in *The Christian Century*. Will you now be open to other viewpoints on abortion or will you still think an article by "feminists for life" gives the other side?

At any rate, we rejoice in our guru status. Now we can up our speaking fees

(Continued on page 157)

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CRIMINAL DICHOTOMIES

SOMETIMES DATA simply doesn't help. Take, for example, the fact that the number of major crimes reported in New York City declined this year, the third year in a row. Still, when a *New York Times* poll taken last January posed the question, "What is New York City's most important problem?" half of those polled responded: crime. It is crucial to note that the poll was taken four weeks after Bernhard Goetz shot four black youths who approached him on a Manhattan subway; eight weeks after Caroline Isenberg, a twenty-three-year-old Harvard graduate, was brutally stabbed to death on her apartment roof; after the well-publicized death of a youth battered with a baseball bat inside a video arcade full of other young people; after the fatal killing of a Brooklyn woman whose cries for help were heard throughout her apartment by tenants who did nothing. New Yorkers find no relief in the data that ranks New York tenth in major crimes among American cities. So what about citizens in the nine cities outranking New York? Crime is no respecter of cities. The litany of heinous deeds is recited in the newspapers of every urban area.

Close scrutiny of the statistics shows that while murder, robbery, and theft are down in New York, three categories of crime, which justifiably inspire public fear, are on the rise: forcible rape up 4.6 percent; assault up 9.6 percent; subway crime up 3.5 percent. The perception of increased crime, at least the kinds of crime people must contend with on a more or less daily basis, is grounded in reality. Such perceptions intimately affect the way people live. For example, 26 percent of the women polled, and 15 percent of the men, stated that staying home after dark is one way to reduce crime. Does crime imprison the innocent more often than the guilty?

Burning public rage inflamed the responses of those who initially hailed the citizen-take-action maneuver of Goetz and sparked articles, editorials, and letters-to-the-editor by the thousands. Talk show subjects, a T-shirt business, and a fund-raising effort bubbled up in the froth of serious people, black and white, who are tired of crime.

Reaction to the Goetz case around the nation revealed the false dichotomies that make their way into newspaper columns, Op-Ed pieces, and editorials, eventually polarizing public debate on crime and criminal justice. On the one hand, we read that racism accounted for the favorable public response toward Goetz who is white and against the four youths who are black. Had the races been reversed, so this argument goes, public sentiment would have also been reversed. That both blacks and whites expressed support for Goetz did not diminish the vehemence of this position. On the other hand, such joint racial support formed the basis for at least one writer's assurance that the Goetz case "promises the end of race and racism as relevant categories in which to discuss the problem of crime."

Predictably, other reactions among professional writers have tended to fall into

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two camps: the law-and-order advocates and the society-is-to-blame commentators. As usual, both extremes have elements of truth in their favor, and both omit some elements of truth and obscure others. Law-and-order saw in Goetz's gunfire a sign of "health" even "moral health"; society-is-to-blame pointed to the "inevitable criminality" of the youths who faced deteriorating neighborhoods, job discrimination, and inferior education.

Unfortunately, the law-and-order advocates make it all too easy for citizens to vent frustration while avoiding responsibility for a distribution of crime that statistically shows social factors are at work as well as individual responsibility. The society-is-to-blame commentators, on the other hand, appear to diminish the element of personal responsibility that most people recognize as basic to society. In trying to forestall reliance on punishing individuals alone, looking instead to long-term solutions, these commentators tend to dismiss people's immediate fears and losses. By not acknowledging the reality in front of people's noses, these observers undermine their own credibility and increase public impatience.

Does the public in fact opt for either the law-and-order or the society-is-to-blame argument? Not really. Although most of those polled by the *Times* approved Goetz's deed, the respondents also endorsed these proposals to reduce crime (highest percentages first): youth job training, better schools, citizens' neighborhood patrols, more foot police, more drug rehabilitation programs, and last, the death penalty. These responses appear to combine the two approaches by providing a way out of unemployment, a chance to rise above drug abuse, education to foster positive attitude formation, while the advantages of increased police and citizen protection attest that not only the "root causes" of crime but its containment and prevention are vital. Conspicuously absent from this list is the need for more prisons, for speedier trials, and for a better way to handle repeat offenders. Instead, there seems to be a leap over the judicial system at this point to the death penalty.

Given this somewhat balanced list from the citizens of a major city one wonders whether the public is equally willing to allocate funds for schools, programs, and police, as well as to volunteer time patrolling the neighborhood. Could a candidate who ran on such a platform be elected?

National concern about crime is justified and the public does well not to succumb to the artificial choice between social spending to eradicate poverty or to improve education or to boost teenage employment on the one hand, and spending to control and prevent crime on the other hand. Both sets of problems merit attention.

Perhaps there is a bit of nostalgia in the desire for foot patrols and neighborhood groups, a yearning from within the world of high-rise apartment buildings for a symbol to assert that each urban dweller is not really anonymous and alone. The groundswell around Goetz was partly an identification with him as a victim, a victim of thuggery, or at least a victim of fear of thuggery. Yet it may be presumed that few passengers in Goetz's subway car felt removed enough from the present threat of danger to offer the same degree of support as others did after the fact and from a safer distance.

Crime forces the issue: what does it mean to live in neighborhood, as in sisterhood or brotherhood? Must we, after all, follow the example of a Goetz whose actions, nurtured by despair about the justice system, amounted to a usurpation of lawful authority? Does urban survival necessitate the daily cultivation of blinding ourselves to what is before us? Or can we cultivate community, and from that joint enterprise, protect ourselves and our values?

Too bad the muggers in the story of the Good Samaritan fled so easily, but then, that story was told not to solve the problem of crime, but to answer the question: who is my neighbor?

REVISING THE LETTER

The bishops are back at work. The difficult task of revising the pastoral letter on the economy is underway. We have already expressed appreciation for what the writers of the first draft accomplished. Now we can add our sympathy in view of the job still to be done. Not only must the drafters consider scores upon scores of proposed revisions; they are being nagged with reminders that, on top of everything else, the letter should be shorter and simpler!

Sympathy will not prevent us from adding our own suggestions, however, even to the point of repeating that easy advice about brevity and simplicity. The impulse behind that advice is sound — make this letter effective *pastorally*. That, at least, has been the guiding principle behind our own proposals, some of which can be said to come "from the left," some "from the right."

1. *Seriously consider dividing the letter in two.* Publish two physically discrete and self-contained documents, voted upon and issued in conjunction with one another — the first dealing with the Catholic vision of economic life, the second with policy issues.

The bishops face a perplexing problem. In the current draft, they have fully acknowledged the difficulties and complexities of moving from the biblical vision and ethical norms of Part One of their letter to all the debatable data and contending economic theories of the "policy applications" in Part Two. They have underlined the limited authority with which they propose to examine specific economic policy issues. They have recognized that even people sharing the same general moral principles may reach different conclusions about specific applications. They have welcomed honest dissent and debate. And they have made practically all these points in flashing neon lights.

To little avail. Commentators continue to accuse the bishops of exceeding their competence and authority by venturing into specifics. Even as intelligent an observer as Joseph A. Califano, Jr., can ask whether recommendations about this or that income-maintenance program are "on the same level as moral principles and biblical admonitions." The bishops answered that question, but alas, they seem to be up against a terminal case of functional illiteracy among reporters and editorialists.

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The result has been to stake the bishops' credibility and authority on precisely that part of their draft where they are relatively tentative rather than most definite. More important, it has distracted attention from fundamental questions about contrasting economic visions.

The solution is not to eliminate the "policy applications." That step would almost certainly be viewed as a disavowal of the first draft's endorsement of a strong positive role for government in the economy. If popular misunderstanding is to count against the current presentation of the "policy applications," it should also count against removing them. More importantly, without the "policy applications" as a measure of the bishops' meaning and seriousness, the whole enterprise is very likely to be sunk in a swamp of conflicting interpretations and easy acquiescence.

So retain the "policy applications" but put them in a "twin" document. Give it a conclusion of its own (once again addressing the nature of the policy debate), and shift the present "Conclusion" to the first document on vision and norms for the economy. That might — just might — help the public understand the relationship between the two concerns, restore some attention to the questions of broader vision, and provide a shorter first document for pastoral purposes.

2. *Place the letter historically*. The first draft provides only the briefest description of the economic events provoking this letter — and mainly noting the diversity of interpretations at that — before beginning the biblical reflections. This section could be strengthened with descriptive material concerning employment, poverty, international trade, etc., now found in the "policy applications" section. But it should also sketch the major transitions affecting our economy, and it should spell out the ways in which people *feel* these events — the "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties" of which *Gaudium et Spes* spoke, as they emerge in relation to economic life and change. It should acknowledge the successes of our economy as well as its failures, and indeed point out how the former no less than the latter give rise to moral challenges. It should note that even in the years while the pastoral was being composed, economic events swung dramatically, confounding both settled and upstart economic theories.

3. *Speak in a more distinctively American voice*. The appeal of President Reagan's "second American revolution" or of the Simon/Novak commission's praise of free enterprise is based, in large measure, on their ability to link their arguments to historical American themes, to capture American pride in the nation's economic and political achievements. There is a real danger of cheap demagogy here, but that is a danger the bishops could well point out even as they draw on the images that sum up American experience, from religious settlement and political revolution to Western frontier and huddled immigrants yearning to breathe free. The letter already connects its appeal for economic rights, equality, and economic democracy to the Founding Fathers' great experiment in political democracy. Even where the contradictions in the American experience yawn wide, there is rich material for the bishops' moral reflections, material moreover with an accent more familiar and understandable than that of papal encyclicals or Rawlsian philosophy.

4. *The letter must address issues of power*. Economic power is translated into political power — and back into economic power. The very definitions of economic problems as well as the efficiency of economic programs are never unrelated to the distribution of power in society. The letter needs to urge not only the criteria for a just economy, but point out the kinds of power equilibria without which the achievement and maintenance of a just economy is unlikely.

5. *The letter must speak to the middle class*. The first draft does succeed in unmistakably communicating one thing — the litmus test of a just economy is the way it meets the needs of the poor and the powerless. The bishops deserve congratulations for getting that message across, especially at a time when it is none too popular. Nonetheless, they run a danger here. Most American Catholics, like most Americans, are not poor. Yet they experience much in their economic lives that the bishops should be addressing. Many in the lower economic brackets share with the poor and the near-poor similar insecurities. Many of those who enjoy economic security along with supervisory or managerial status confront decisions during the work week that seem to contradict the obligations preached on Sunday. Many in all classes feel an uncertainty about the point of their work, a tug between job and family, an anxiety about getting the "best chance" for their children, and a pressure to relieve their fears through consumption. At the same time, these Catholics and Americans may find in their work a pride of accomplishment, a sense of initiative, everyday discipline, or simple warmth of comradeship that needs to be recognized and encouraged. "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" of economic life are not limited to the poor; and unless the bishops call this to mind, the letter they write may simply not catch fire in the imaginations of many Catholics; may seem, at best, an exercise in *noblesse oblige*.

There is a problem of language here. The biblical language of rich and poor, picked up by liberation theology, may need little translation when applied to societies where eighty percent of the population is poor. That is not the case in the U.S. Such language, moreover, risks suggesting that everyone who is not poor (and in the U.S., we have a distinct measure for poverty) is rich. Most American Catholics, who are not poor, also know they are not rich. They must not be left with the sense that the language of the bishops' letter is simply talking about some other world than the one they know.

6. *Strengthen the letter's treatment of economic democracy*. This phrase has been derided by conservative critics of the letter as some kind of foreign import from Swedish socialism. In fact, the notion has perfectly good Christian and American pedigree. Certainly it speaks to the needs of the poor and powerless in proposing a rightful economic minimum that would not leave anyone excluded from social participation. But it also speaks to the American democratic heritage and to issues of power. And it speaks to questions of the meaningfulness of work and the sharing of initiative and responsibility, questions posed to people at all levels of economic security.

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An expanded call for "a new American experiment" in economic democracy would also assure that the bishops' vision and norms for a just economy, even standing apart from their specific "policy applications," would capture attention, and provoke reflection — in sum, do what an effective teaching instrument should.

CORRECTIONS

Several serious errors crept into the last two issues of *Commonweal*. The text by Jacques Maritain, "A Society Without Money," discussed by Bernard Doering in the February 22 issue is scheduled to appear in English in a forthcoming issue of the *Review of Social Economy*. This important acknowledgment, which was to accompany Professor Doering's identification, was inadvertently omitted. Similarly embarrassing is our misspelling of Renée Weber's name on both the cover and p. 122 of the same issue. In the February 8 issue, a line was dropped from Richard Wightman Fox's review of Christopher Lasch's *The Minimal Self*. The start of the new paragraph in the third column on page 87 should read: *"The Culture of Narcissism* broadened the argument by bringing back the alienated intellectuals from *The New Radicalism* and linking them to the therapeutic elite of *Haven in a Heartless World.*"

Our apologies to Professors Doering, Weber, and Fox, and to the editors of the *Review of Social Economy*.

Repatriation

HOMELAND MAGNET

MOSCOW WELCOMES ITS PRODIGALS

IT USED TO BE that if you were Russian and you had abandoned the homeland you could forget about ever returning. A primitive, clannish vindictiveness guided the Soviet government in matters of repatriation. If you left, you were a traitor, period. One extreme manifestation of this ferocious demand for loyalty was Stalin's practice of punishing Soviet soldiers who fell into German hands during World War II. They went straight from German concentration camps to Soviet ones according to the logic that capture proved disloyalty. A true son of the fatherland would have courted death rather than risk capture. (In the USSR, World War II is known by the emotive-patriotic term, "The Great Fatherland War of the Soviet Union.")

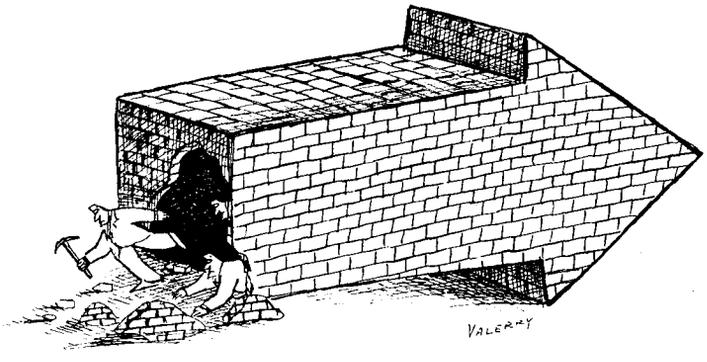
Now it appears the Soviet government is displaying an unaccustomed warmth toward some of its prodigals, repatriation with a human face. With suitable public repentance on their part, certain defectors and deserters have been allowed to rejoin the fatherland after abandoning it. You can un-defect. You *can* go home again.

At least you could if you were the journalist Oleg Bitov, who claimed to have been kidnapped by British agents; Igor Rykov, Oleg Khlan, and Nikolai Ryzhkov, who all deserted in Afghanistan; and of course, Svetlana Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter, who *defected* — no ambiguity about it — to the United States in 1967, her way of celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.

We don't know what negotiations, deals, plea-bargainings, and promises were concluded between these five individuals and Soviet authorities. We don't know if these examples represent the start of a major campaign on the part of the Soviet government to woo back the hundreds of cultural and political dissidents who have defected in recent years or who were handed one-way tickets to the West and stripped of their Soviet citizenship. We don't know if an even larger target is intended: the tens of thousands of Soviet Jews, Armenians, and Germans whose emigration was a palpable by-product of détente and whose return, even in small numbers, would be a Soviet triumph in these days of renewed Cold War. The reinterring of Boris Chaliapin's remains in Moscow recently even suggests that return is not limited to the living.

What we do know is that for many Russians, the fatherland exerts a powerful, mystical magnetism, like no other in the West.

A cliché? Part of the old overheated nonsense about a purported Russian soul? Well, speak to any émigré, even the most anti-Soviet, and you will notice the eyes clouding over with tenderness for the homeland when the subject comes up. Some describe this Russian suffering as *toska*, a longing for the lost homeland. The film director Andrei Tarkovsky, the most recent Soviet defector-luminary, called his last film *Nostalghia*, and reminded Westerners that the word is pronounced in Russian with a hard "g." "To us," Tarkovsky said, "the word signifies a painful and destructive mood or feeling." The film is a bleak portrait of a brooding Soviet scholar in Italy researching the life of an eighteenth-century Russian émigré composer who eventually committed suicide. His own condition as an expatriate was reflected in the film, Tarkovsky explained. So, a melancholic Russian director films abroad the story of a melancholic Russian scholar abroad researching the life of a melancholic Russian composer living abroad. This *nostalghia*, according to Tarkovsky, "mixed the love for your homeland and the melancholy that arises from being far away. It is an illness, a moral suffering which tortures the soul. It can be fatal if one is not able to overcome it, but it can be



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contracted only in a foreign country." Given this diagnosis and the self-evident cure, it should come as no surprise if Tarkovsky were to un-defect as well.

Back in Moscow, Sergeant Ryzhkov described his homesickness and despair while in England. "If previously," he said, "our heads were burning with narcotics [in Afghanistan], now [in London] it was with thoughts of home. I came to understand clearly that I could live only in the land of my birth."

At her press conference in Moscow, Svetlana Alliluyeva reported that two triggers helped push her homewards. One was what she saw as the absence of feeling, during D-Day commemorations in the West, for the Soviet dead in World War II. Never mind her father's pact with Hitler or his peculiar reluctance to take Hitler's invasion seriously when it came; never mind *Western* losses or the vast Western contribution to the Soviet war effort in the form of lend lease: that the USSR suffered some 20 million dead in battling and defeating the Germans is a stark, awesome fact that no Russian, defector or loyalist, will allow anyone in the West to forget.

The other trigger for Alliluyeva was seeing the Soviet film *Oblomov*. Who couldn't help wanting to go to Russia, even for just a visit, after seeing Nikita Mikhalkov's beautiful film? It is based on the great nineteenth-century novel by Ivan Goncharov about a title character who suffers from anhedonia and neurasthenia, a sort of Slavonic-aristocratic Woody Allen. The celebrated opening scene takes pages and pages to get Oblomov out of bed. For his torpor and indiscipline Russians have taken Oblomov to be a national type. Lenin condemned "Oblomovism." Yet the film amounts to a reverie for traditional Russia. On the soundtrack are Rachmaninoff's *Vespers*. (Rachmaninoff: another émigré who died in the West. Will Holy Soviet Russia claim his remains, too?) A sleigh glides along the snow past the pastel-colored facades of old St. Petersburg. And there is the broad, Russian *douceur* of Oblomov himself, who, after all, seeks only *pokoi*, an untranslatable word connoting unruffled serenity. He doesn't want any hassles, we would say. Alliluyeva would sympathize. Explaining that she sought private peace, not political freedom, she says that in the West she "was not free . . . for one single day. I was in the hands of businessmen, lawyers, political figures and publishers" interested in her as a commodity.

The film's last scene has a child, the son of the dead Oblomov, running across endless fields beneath a wide-open sky crying "Mama, mama, mama. . . ." The boy had been adopted by Oblomov's friends; he was on his way to meet his real mother who visited him occasionally. She didn't say so at her press conference, but I'll bet Svetlana Alliluyeva, who longed to see her children and grandchildren, wept during this cinematic epiphany exalting reunion in Mother Russia.

If you want to understand Russia and the Russians, learn why they defect. Better, learn why some go back.

LOUIS MENASHE

(Louis Menashe teaches Russian history at the Polytechnic Institute of New York and lives not far from Little Odessa by the Sea.)

Of several minds: *Abigail McCarthy*

EXPENSE OF MYTHMAKING

THE REWORKING OF POLITICAL REALITY

A NATION IS entitled to its heroes and its myths. The fact that our heroes today are often the creations of public relations image-making and that our historical myths owe as much to the media as they do to serious historians does not diminish their importance. Historians, after all, have always had a selective view of history. Classicist Edith Hamilton makes it clear that the great Greek myths were not primitive efforts to explain reality but the conscious creation of literary artists. Heroes and myths are necessarily part of the half-truths and semi-fictions which become the received ideology of a society.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in a consideration of the Kennedy reality and the Kennedy myth in American politics. The myth is an attractive one. It conforms almost exactly to the American Heritage Dictionary definition of the word: "Any real or fictional story, recurring theme, or character type that appeals to the consciousness of a people by embodying its cultural ideas or by giving expression to a deep, commonly held emotion."

It is because the Kennedy story embodies so many of the cultural ideas of a generation and because it gives expression to an emotion deeply held that it is difficult, even reckless, to point out facts which contradict any one of its elaborations such as the recent CBS "docudrama" on Robert Kennedy. It seems graceless even to try. Yet, when a distortion of verifiable history has the effect of robbing one's children of a rightful pride in their heritage and presents the world with a false picture of their father and mother, one must try to set the record straight.

It is important to put this discussion in the perspective of American political reality. We like to say that ours is a government of laws, not of men. But in reality as European interpreter of American life, D.W. Brogan, reminds us, this saying conceals an important truth — America was made by men, and those men were politicians.

Those men who shaped America — those who organized the uprising against George III and framed the marvelous compromise of the Constitution, who, around Hamilton, gave the new nation financial stability, and, around Jefferson, facilitated the rapid expansion to the West — those men, we are reminded,

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shared a framework of ideas, a common practical political philosophy (although they differed in its expression).

In the second half of the twentieth century the conditions of political life are very different. Men and women are handicapped by the complexity of modern life, by the increasingly difficult character of social problems, and by the absence of any generally accepted body of opinion. Today, because we lack any unifying and what historian Richard Hofstadter calls any "plausible" body of belief, as we have in his view ever since Franklin Roosevelt, we have become increasingly receptive to personal leadership as a substitute. Those in the political process group themselves around men not so much because of a philosophy as because they hitch their star to that of the emerging or already emerged leader. Their well-being, their security, and their future is linked to his. In short, we are back to the politics of the clan and a feudal political order.

John Kennedy became the symbolic embodiment of the World War II generation too long held out of power by aging world leaders. He was also the symbol of outsiders no longer merely tolerated, no longer just admitted to the process but, at long last, *in command* — a symbol to the descendants of immigrants, to ethnic groups (very specially to Irish-Catholics and, by extension, all other Catholics), to "the best and the brightest" of academia and the intelligentsia. He embodied all of them, and he did it in a manner suitable to imaginations of the first TV-formed generation. He and the glistening coterie of family, friends, and cohorts surrounding him were the dream become the reality. All this was cut short by a wanton killer. It was no wonder that those who had found fulfillment in his rise longed for, even demanded, a restoration in the person of his brother. And that hope was again cut off, in turn, by the killing of Robert Kennedy.

To understand this, however, does not mean that one should accept as part of the folk-myth a rewriting of the history of 1968, especially since such a rewriting will further contribute to the disarray of the Democratic party whose present plight is largely owing to its failure to absorb the lessons of that election year. Nor should such a rewriting be condoned by historians — Arthur Schlesinger among them.

The docu-drama reduces the McCarthy campaign of 1968 to a "testing of the waters," stigmatizing the candidate as "a spoiler" apparently in that, *after* Eugene McCarthy had announced for the presidency *four months* before Kennedy saw a 1968 campaign as viable, *after* his supporters had won him first place on the California ballot by petition, *after* he had won a significant number of delegates in Minnesota, *after* he had shown the incumbent president vulnerable by his campaign in New Hampshire, *after* all the polls showed him winning the Wisconsin primary, *after* he had brought dissent over the escalation in Vietnam out of the streets and into the political process, he did not yield to the inevitability of a Kennedy candidacy! Add to this the implication that he did not accept the offer of a vaguely described Kennedy deal only because his wife was against it.

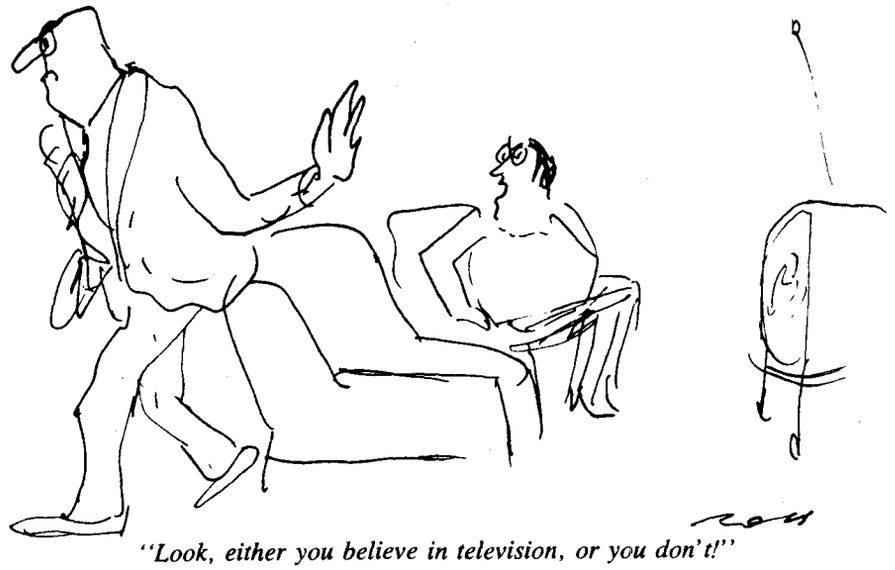
As to the last, and to me puzzling, allegation — originally attributed to Senator Edward Kennedy — it was dealt with in detail in my own account of the 1968 election in *Private Faces/Public Places* (Doubleday). The writers of a docu-drama interested in a true picture might well have consulted it.

Journalistic histories of 1968, notably that by *London Times* writers Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, *American Melodrama* (Viking, 1969) and Newhouse political writer Jules Witcover's *85 Days* were written by men who were eyewitnesses to the events and privy to much of the discussion of the principals in that year. They faithfully document Robert Kennedy's tragic misreading of the time, and the less-than-heroic reasoning which made him reluctant to run until someone else had shown the way. There are any number of other contemporary accounts.

Unfortunately, a charismatic leader is not allowed even understandable vacillation. The *Times* writers cite famed sociologist Max Weber's dictum: *charisma does not recognize any legitimacy other than one which flows from personal strength proven time and time again*. To hesitate to risk, to lose even one election (as Kennedy did in Oregon), is to damage that legitimacy — so it can not be admitted to. Charisma, as they point out, is easily endangered; it is also intolerant. The followers of a charismatic leader consider it the *duty* of others to recognize their leader — hence, heaven help the one who challenges him. Their own recognition is "a matter of complete personal devotion" (Weber).

Thus the members of the clan surrounding Robert Kennedy — staff, writers, singers, stars, athletes, executives, academics, other politicians — looking again to restoration, and motivated by the imperative of charismatic leadership, must assent to the rearrangement of history no matter what the cost to others.

ABIGAIL McCARTHY



"Look, either you believe in television, or you don't!"

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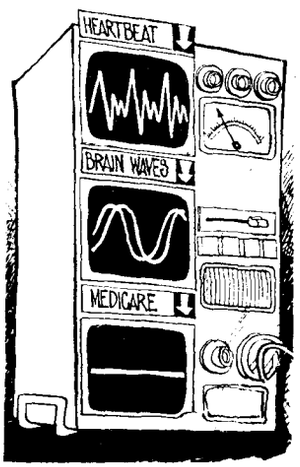

Diminishing resources, critical choices

DENA SEIDEN

OUR SOCIETY sustains the myth that physicians, and occasionally nurses, make life and death decisions for us and control the degree of health and sickness. The role of the health care administrator is seen as adjunct: balancing the budget, dealing with labor strikes, involving and placating both the local community and the Board of Trustees. In fact, those roles began to change twenty years ago and are now invalid. Physicians and nurses still make immediate decisions on patient care that have implications for life and death. But who gets care, when, where, how much, of what quality, and with what technology is, for the most part, no longer determined by clinical personnel. Rather, it is determined by administrators in individual hospitals, governmental and semi-public agencies.

This fact is remarkable on several counts: (1) it has not been appreciated by the general community; (2) paradoxically, it has been well understood by most physicians who fully grasp the degree to which they are controlled by bureaucratic regulations, however much they resent it; (3) it is not understood by administrators themselves whose training and inclination often make them view themselves in a subordinate role; (4) it leaves administrators who are trained only in "business" skills such as budgeting, staffing, reimbursement, etc., to make decisions of immense ethical significance for which they have no training, hence no framework within which they can place these decisions. Consequently, there is an urgent, severe need to develop an ethics of hospital administration.

The about-face described above is of recent origin. From the mid-nineteenth century on, physicians successfully put energy into controlling their environment. Physicians defined who was sick and who was healthy. They formed powerful professional organizations and lobbies which generated financial systems that guaranteed physicians' wealth and independence. The fee-for-service system of payment made physicians successful individual entrepreneurs, dependent on no one for outside funding. Indeed, it often made them the major source of funding for the hospitals in which they practiced. This in turn gave them considerable control in these institutions. The professional organizations saw to it that licensed physicians (licensing itself is a control device) were the only legitimated sources of healing. Lobbies drew on the beliefs and perceptions, already apparent in the community, that physicians were beyond law, politics, and ordinary finance — a sacred group to and for the culture. Thus the system was controlled by its practitioners.

This control began to wane somewhat after World War II, with the rise of third-party insurers such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Health insurance had existed before, but after the war, with the widespread inclusion of such insurance into labor union contracts and managerial benefit plans, it became a major force in American health. Significantly, insurers began paying money directly to hospitals through administration, though some payments continued directly to physicians. Presently physicians receive only 20 percent of all health care dollars.

The spread of insurance, the gaining strength of the hospital labor unions, the explosion of new technologies — all these contributed to rising health care costs and the rising power of a managerial class. However, when the Medicare and Medicaid legislation of the mid-sixties went into effect, the whole face of health financing and administration changed. The government was guaranteeing payment for patients who had previously been charity cases. These patients had been seen, if at all, by physicians and hospitals who accepted them as "bad debts" and as "teaching material." Now these unwanted patients were paying customers, and payment for them went straight to the hospitals, not the physicians, except for specific physician services. In the large urban and suburban teaching hospitals, these patients were generally cared for by house staff (interns and residents) who were members of the salaried labor force of the hospitals for which the hospital then received payment.

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Medicaid and Medicare payments were built on hospital costs. The total number of patient care days in a given period was divided into total cost, and, presto, that became the daily rate at which the hospital was reimbursed for each patient day for the *next* eighteen months, a retrospective cost system. What an incentive this was to pile on more and more cost — build new wings, new buildings, hire more staff, and most particularly, hire more house officers to take care of ever more Medicaid and Medicare patients, and so the expansion cycle continued. This is not necessarily negative — hospitals until quite recently were looked upon as a social good. It did mean, however, that society was pledged to spend its health dollars in certain ways. Those dollars would be spent in hospitals, for acute and critical care, rather than in preventive and/or non-hospital projects, and would require an even larger administrative staff to manage them.

Providing health care is one of the more specific activities of life. Its goals are to maximally prolong the functioning and wellness of the population and to optimally treat, and if possible cure, sickness in the individual and community. Sometimes its goals include cheating death for a while; sometimes its goals are to ease death. In our society, this very specific activity takes place mainly in hospitals. The mission of hospitals then is tied to the above definition, and can also reasonably include teaching professionals and nonprofessionals skills which are designed to promote health and combat sickness. Research is included for the promotion of health and defeat of illness, though the path may be more indirect.

What is of interest to us is that these changes in financing medical care turned hospitals into big business. A large urban teaching hospital which thought of itself as a big business with a budget of $20 million in 1965, had a budget of $180 million by 1980. And as hospitals became big business, full-time administrators trained in business methods were hired to run them. The schools of hospital administration were often placed in the business schools of a university or offered joint degrees in business administration and finance administration along with their degrees in hospital administration and public health.

Learning good business techniques is necessary if one is setting out to run a hospital. The central point, though, is that the qualities valued in hospital administrators have not been devotion to the common good: in this case, the health of the populace and the cure of the sick. Rather, the qualities prized, paid for, and promoted have been "aggressive" institutional aggrandizement, manipulating the financial and bureaucratic system so that the institution gains even if there is a conflict with the health of the populace.

Administrators of the system, in hospitals, health bureaucracies, profit-making hospital chains, and drug companies are all largely working from the same ideology: the "bottom line" is to operate in the black. The industry has grown from 7.2 percent of the GNP in 1970 to 10.7 percent in 1984, and continues to inspire aggressive management. The admired executive is the one who enlarges the system, who "gets ahead."

What does this mean, practically? It means "de-marketing," a new and creative use of language in health administration. "Marketing" in health has always meant getting your hospital involved with well-insured, not chronically ill, largely younger and middle-class citizens. "De-marketing" means making an administrative decision to "dump" uninsured or not well-insured, chronically ill, older, lower-class citizens. Practically, it means rearranging clinic fees to a level so that the latter group can no longer afford the services of that hospital. Or, if this covert action is politically impossible, it can mean limiting the number of times per month or per year that an individual may be seen in clinic regardless of the diagnosis. Or, even more subtly, it can be done by making the patient wait several months for an appointment, and then wait eight or more hours on the day of the appointment so that a truly sick person, a marginally employed person, a mother with several children at home will be discouraged from seeking treatment. The hospital can then switch its resources back to marketing the desirable group. For example, well-appointed group practices can be located in desirable neighborhoods.

It is primarily health care administrators who make this type of decision, not physicians. And it is done in the name of the institution, so that the institution can survive, grow, prosper. The defense of these practices is always the same — otherwise the hospital would not be able to treat anyone. The unasked question is whether such a price for institutional survival is acceptable. These practices are, if not sanctioned, at least tolerated by society at large. It would be a serious error to lay blame solely or even mainly at the feet of health care managers. Through the political, judicial, and information-dispensing mechanisms of society, we all must work out what is an acceptable health system, even as health technology is forcing us to rethink our definitions of life and death. Meanwhile, and this is the point, administrators of health care deal with these issues daily.

The ethical issues in health administration are the allocation of resources and the uses of technology (including a true understanding of what that use may mean). These two issues often come together, each enlarging the questions of the other, each impinging on the question: what price survival? What resources, what technology will society, through the decisions of the health care system, devote to keeping alive those who would have died naturally a few years ago? And at what cost to those now alive and those yet to come?

The Baby Doe case (1982) brought to national attention the issue of whether parents and physicians could withhold lifesaving treatment from their retarded newborn child. The boy died before the issue could be settled in court where suit had been brought. The Baby Jane Doe case raised the same issues (1983) plus the question of society's right, acting through the executive and judicial arms of the government in this case, to remove the issue from the sole jurisdiction of parents and physicians into itself. Who has the right to make a decision to withhold treatment? The Baby Doe case had caused a furor by limiting the right to only physician and parent.

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However, the underlying questions, for administrators and for society as a whole, about the societal resources consumed by these children and what the use of technology could accomplish in securing even minimally functional lives for them were not well-surfaced in the hubbub surrounding either of these cases.

TWO EXAMPLES, may make the point clearer. At a large county hospital, I saw and reviewed the records of a day-old male baby, born at one pound, twelve ounces and immediately rushed to the neonatology intensive care unit. Until quite recently, children born under two pounds died. Now technology can keep them alive. The boy was hydrocephalic, as well as premature at twenty-six weeks. The mother arrived at the hospital in labor, claiming heroin addiction and asking for intravenous methadone to stave off withdrawal pains. The baby was initially diagnosed for an esophageal fistula, for which immediate surgery was planned.

In the neonatology intensive care unit around the baby boy were heavy concentrations of skilled medical personnel and extraordinarily expensive equipment and supplies. I have no quarrel with what was going on in that unit — there was dedicated, brutally hard work apparent everywhere. Nor do I offer any definitive opinion on whether that child should have been rushed to intensive care. A brief reading of the medical chart left several questions unanswered: the mother's wishes, the delivering physician's best judgment on viability.

But two separate sets of issues are raised with great urgency. The first set concerns the necessity of every single health care institution to set some guidelines, to have some ethics board that sets policy and hears disputes in individual cases to prevent either the automatic extension of extraordinary measures to prolong life or, conversely, to withdraw life-sustaining treatment. This allows all concerned — the staff, the patients, the public — to have the same understanding of what a given hospital's policy is. It also restores thought, reason, and compassion as values in hospital decision-making, as opposed to responses based on custom, inclination, or fear of lawsuit. In the end, it will probably be necessary to have boards and guidelines operating under some broader laws of the society, if only to avoid endless lawsuits. If reason and compassion are to return to health care decisions, then health care administrators must play a major role in forming policy in their institutions.

The second set of issues raised by the case of the hydrocephalic premature boy pertains to the absence of any parallel concentration of labor and equipment that might *prevent* certain tragedies from recurring. Where is the hospital, multi-

institutional, private, or governmental program that will attempt to find such high-risk mothers and, with acknowledged difficulty, deliver prenatal health care, screening, and nutrition?

Such efforts may fail with individual mothers, but can anyone think they would fail with the majority of mothers who badly want a healthy child but who may not know how to produce one? The mother in this case cannot be presumed to have wanted harm for her child, but she may well have been unable to prevent that harm.

As a society, we are conditioned to the technological fix — if we can do something, then we should do it, no matter the cost. Moon shots, nuclear energy, and medical technology all fall under this rubric. But there is an enormous cost to such use of technology far beyond the direct cost of the machinery and labor. What are we *not* doing with that money? *The New England Journal of Medicine* in August, 1981 and *Pediatrics* in June, 1978 estimated the average cost of a stay in a neonatology intensive care unit from $14,000 to $88,000 depending on the ensuing complications. The figure given to me in that county hospital was $1,500 per patient day. Several "million dollar babies" were pointed out to me: infants and children who could not be weaned off respirators and/or other equipment — children two-years-old whose parents had not visited for twenty months — who could not be referred anywhere more conducive to the normal development of a child because no other place in that city had the requisite technology.

As our society rushes to build more intensive care units, we notice, with great dismay, that our medical costs are rising far above our other costs, that they seem uncontrollable. So we allow the government to cut back, among other things, the Women and Infant Children program (W.I.C.) which supplies solid nutrition for pre-and post-natal mothers and children, thereby insuring ourselves a new crop of candidates for neonatology intensive care units.

These sets of circumstances come from decisions made by administrators and bureaucrats within the health care system. They are partly made, like the blind men's description of the elephant, without consciousness of the whole. They are influenced by the frustration of trying to reach people outside the usual health care system, and by the realization that they will bring no personal advancement or political gain to the individual administrator. These are decisions in which the ethical component could hardly be more striking. They are made by health care administrators at all levels. For instance, once a hospital has decided to build a neonatology intensive care unit, it has already so skewed its resources that a large commitment to prenatal nutrition and screening may not be possible. On another level, once Medicaid officials have made an open-ended commitment to reimburse neonatology intensive care units, rather than prenatal screening and nutrition, it is not hard to predict what kind of health care patterns we will be seeing.

The second example, because it involves policy-making, goes beyond merely administrative decisions to societal ones. I worked in a hospital where the wing in which abortions were

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done and the wing in which the neonatology intensive care unit was located, were on the same floor. This hospital performed abortions up until the end of the second trimester, or twenty-four weeks. In the abortion wing, there were sometimes live healthy infants, fully formed, perfectly viable. In the neonatology unit were desperately sick infants with multiple anomalies and with tubes and lines inserted so they could live. On the one side, the viable, who would die. And on the other, the sick, who at great expense, might live, but might also have a painful, prolonged death in an alien environment.

There is a question here that challenges the way in which life and death are perceived and dealt with. Every single health care decision is made by some combination of the individual involved, medical staff, and the health care administrators who provide and pay for the decision as it becomes action. What standard are they being instructed to follow by the larger society and/or its constituent groups? If there is none, shouldn't there be?

A clear example, for which the daily press highlights the need, is the necessity for a hospital policy on patients with permanent loss of consciousness and/or who are in a persistent vegetative state. As the stories in the media, and as daily life makes plain, this is a problem of even greater severity among older patients. The law is now sufficiently open-ended to allow physicians, administrators, trustees, and hospitals to be sued for murder and/or assisted suicide if they fail to resuscitate unconscious, vegetative patients. It is necessary to provide some basis in law to allow patients who wish to die, or whose families give consent to their death, to be allowed to do so. But after that, each hospital must come to grips with its response to those questions, and here the administrator as manager, leader, and policy-maker must play a key role in ethical decision-making.

I would like to think that at this juncture my premise is clear: health care administrators are as deeply involved with ethical questions as medical personnel. The latter are involved on an individual, one-to-one basis. The former are involved on a broader, social scale, but their decisions affect life and health every bit as much as those of medical personnel. Neither society nor the health care administrator is aware of the truly overwhelming ethical content of these decisions. Both think the decisions are financial, managerial, and "housekeeping" functions. In consequence, major decisions are made as though they have no ethical content, and thus often have unlooked-for, negative consequences for the population.

The currently proposed changes in health-funding by the present administration and those already in place will make the ethical dilemma for administrators that much more acute. The obvious problem is that as fewer resources are available, it becomes more difficult to decide how best to use them. The less obvious problem is that the changes place even greater power in administrative hands (for reasons beyond the scope of this article) and it will be administrators more than physicians who decide how long patients stay in hospitals, in what setting they are treated, what types of cases are "acceptable," and so on.

Obviously, there is a need to develop an ethics of health care administration. This should begin with the idea of mission: facilitating health and combating sickness. The next step would be to orient the profession to the fact that health care administrators have power; that power has an inevitable ethical component; that this power must come to terms with the question of the allocation of resources, the use of technology, and the meaning of institutional survival. Without such a basis of understanding, health care administrators cannot act fully, much less ethically. They are not actors, but reactors, and willingly or not, perpetuate a frequently unequal, chaotic method of providing health care.

The Hippocratic Oath meant for physicians has come under justified criticism recently for its insistence that the physician do what is best for the patient without consulting anyone, including the patient. But one sentence within the Oath is useful as a grounding for health care ethics, if provision is made for the contractual nature of the relationship between the patient, the physician, and the administrator: "The regimen I adopt shall be for the benefit of my patients according to my ability and judgment and not for their hurt or any wrong." With this in mind, a beginning framework for ethical administrative decision-making might include:

- Every technology must be weighed for its direct and indirect costs, its direct and indirect benefits and harms, before being pursued.
- The same considerations hold for resource allocation. Examples of resource problems might include an individual hospital's commitment to a large new renal dialysis program at the expense of cutting space, staff, and equipment for geriatrics or, conversely, a reassessment of the effect of open-ended Medicare financing on provision of care to younger sectors of society.
- The trade-offs between acute care and public health must be understood and acted upon at both the institutional and societal levels. That is, hospitals must have the tools to treat heart attack and trauma victims, remove gall bladders, insert artificial hips. But unless hospitals as a group, and society as a whole, deal with obesity, tobacco, alcohol, insufficient exercise, environmental pollutants, carcinogenic industries, etc., we will forever be cleaning up bigger and bigger messes, probably with bigger and bigger technology.
- Every chief executive officer should be responsible for initiating and/or implementing policies for (a) resuscitation of the unconscious; (b) resuscitation or destruction of live fetuses; (c) aggressive treatment of the terminally ill.
- The profession should be radicalized, neither to the left nor right, but to a consideration of the administrator as rational actor, not blind reactor. Implicit in this is an emphasis on mission — to serve the goals of patient care and sickness prevention.
- The health administrator should make his or her decisions cognizant of the need for institutional survival and patient treatment, but also for the general health of the community. The administrator takes the role of the advocate of society's health.

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There is one other general principle: the health of the individual and the health of the group will sometimes come into conflict. Those decisions must be looked at even more carefully, aware that this is the comparison being made, such as in closing a hospital to further admissions in order to better care for those patients already within the walls.

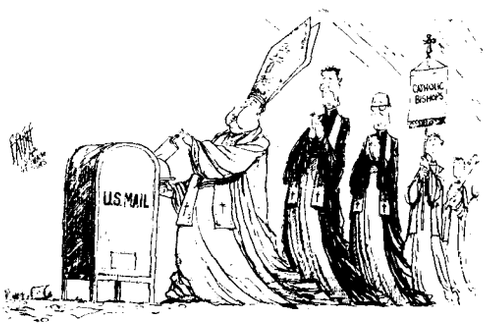
The decision to *manage* matters dealing with health, sickness, and death is a vocational decision, a statement of mission. It is a calling, as such things are, to serve. The administrator can easily be several steps removed from actual people with real needs and real suffering. Clinicians have an edge here — they cannot easily escape reality except by the fiercest denial. The administrator, located behind two secretaries and a receptionist, can easily imagine that she or he is working for the "good of the institution" and rest content.

This view raises institution above people, a depressingly common experience in history and at the present time. It is mistaken. The first step in the creation of an ethic of health care administration is to reject this idea as mistaken and to assert that institutions serve people, not the other way round.

This assertion can then form the beginning of an ethic of health care administration. The fact that there is no discipline, no body of literature on the ethics of health care administration, is a call for it to be produced. The questions are clear — the allocation of resources, the use of technology, the meaning of health institutions — and are now decided by administrators. Health can and should mean the maintenance of well-being as well as the defeat of sickness, assisting all lives to wholeness. The education and creation of health care administrators who speak from an understanding of the ethical responsibilities of their power will substantially move us toward this goal. But the best health care can be gained only when the larger society attends to the issues of distributive justice and compassion implicit in all of these questions.

SEEING THE PASTORALS THROUGH

On not writing a dead letter



GORDON C. ZAHN

THE BISHOPS' 1983 pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," is one of the most significant achievements of the U.S. hierarchy — or any national hierarchy. The recent publication of the first draft of the forthcoming pastoral on the economy gives promise that it will be a suitable match for its predecessor.

This is not to say that either or both of them taken together are everything one would have hoped. There are some distressing shortcomings when, at the point of making a truly innovative and daring contribution, the familiar pattern of timorous caution asserts itself and the opportunity is missed.

Such disappointments, one may assume, are structured into the overall process. Political and other pragmatic considerations almost preclude the adoption of positions likely to be considered too radical a departure from prevailing attitudes and practices. The Weakland committee, like the Bernardin committee before it, will always be conscious of the fact that the product of its labors must ultimately win approval from two-thirds of their episcopal colleagues. These, in turn, will not support a document unlikely to receive a reasonable measure of acceptance from the faithful in their charge. That the peace pastoral was adopted with a majority which approached unanimity is remarkable. That majority may also be taken as evidence of compromises made and restraints incorporated into committee deliberations and the final writing. The failure of the final version to accept all the recommendations of those of us of a more pacifist persuasion was no surprise. We welcomed the pastoral as a starting point to a more consistent, less ambiguous official church posture in the future.

So it seemed at least. When one considered the emphasis placed on incorporating the pastoral teachings into every level of Catholic education, those expectations were more than justified — provided, of course, the bishops who voted for adoption were committed to their decision. Today, however, fears have arisen that this is not the case, that the document may go the way of so many others and end up as little more than an occasional footnote in some theological treatise.

If so, the loss would be much greater than the waste of time and effort it would represent. To allow the peace pastoral to lose momentum and become a "dead letter" in a literal sense could have a disastrous effect upon the Weakland letter and any subsequent efforts on the part of the bishops to address major social issues and responsibilities. It is not too late to revive the enthusiasm with which "The Challenge of Peace" was originally received. It is not too late, but the promise is fading.

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The situation is doubly depressing when one notes that the draft of the present economics pastoral contains the same essential flaws. Of these I would stress three: the reticence of the bishops to be prepared to "tell it like it is"; the refusal to include some mechanism for periodically monitoring progress; and, most unfortunate of all, the failure to follow through with their own recommendations. Unless these failings are recognized and corrected, both "The Challenge of Peace" and the economic pastoral will be dismissed as a futile exercise in pious rhetoric.

Lest this be misinterpreted, I am not asking the bishops to revert to what was sometimes derided as a kind of "creeping infallibility." One of the more admirable aspects of the peace pastoral was its careful delineation of the levels of authority claimed for its teachings, a path echoed in the draft of the economics pastoral. Established or defined doctrine is presented as morally binding; opinions, interpretations, and applications are open to informed dialogue, even dissent. This probably reflects the desire to anticipate challenges on the grounds of expertise, an anticipation since fulfilled in generous measure. Unfortunately, this thoroughly laudable intention sometimes slipped over the line to a tone of defensiveness that weakens the thrust of what the bishops were trying to say. After all, the intensive consultations with experts should have provided sufficient confidence to speak with greater authority, especially when it came to the application of the moral principles in which they, the bishops, are presumably experts.

The excessive reticence of the peace pastoral is most pronounced in its applications to specified categories of individuals. Take the men and women of the armed forces. If the Vatican Council's condemnation of area warfare is morally binding, as the pastoral insists, one might have expected Catholics to be instructed to reject assignments in which they would be prepared to perform the condemned acts upon command. Catholic lawmakers might have been exhorted to consider the moral implications of approving the expenditure of tax monies to support weapons systems like the MX. In the November election, bishops were quite vocal about reminding Catholic candidates for public office of their obligation to give weight to the moral dimensions of other public issues.

One hopes the Weakland committee will not repeat this pattern but will make it perfectly clear to all that economic policies or practices which conflict with Christian social teaching must be opposed and, should this be required, the bishops will not hold back from making explicit recommendations for specific programs designed to eliminate the structured injustices now present in this nation and the entire world. To do so would be to invite sharp criticism, but the ensuing debate would be far more beneficial in the long run than merely repeating a litany of inspirational generalizations.

THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL concession to pragmatism in the 1983 pastoral was the "strictly conditioned moral acceptance" of nuclear deterrence. Quite apart from the wisdom of this disputed decision, a crucial deficiency lay in the bishops' failure — or, more correctly, *refusal* — to establish some mechanism to monitor progress in arms reduction, a basic condition for the bishops' conditioned acceptance of nuclear deterrence. At the Chicago meeting several bishops proposed to correct this omission but failed in their attempt. Now, nearly two years later, it is obvious that the conditions have been ignored, and the pastoral has had little impact on this nation's nuclear policies or the steadily escalating arms race. At its annual assembly in San Antonio last October, Pax Christi USA undertook to fill the gap by releasing its own detailed assessment of the present state of disarmament and negotiations. This likewise was largely ignored. It is safe to say that an official statement issued in the name of those who had set forth those "strict conditions" upon which that highly debatable and reluctant moral acceptance was based would have carried more weight.

In this context the failure of the bishops to follow through in their own dioceses is an additional challenge to episcopal credibility. Last Spring, our Pax Christi Center addressed letters to all the ordinaries seeking information as to what was being done in their dioceses. We offered our assistance in providing counseling and support services for Catholics subject to registration and a possible draft who might take advantage of the pastoral's provisions on conscientious objection. Fewer than ten responses were received. It is evident from other sources that relatively few dioceses have established registries of prospective CO's, or have indicated a readiness to take even the most preliminary steps toward providing them with alternative service opportunities, should conscription be put into effect. It is important to note that the Selective Service System, for its part, is ready to go into full operation in a matter of hours.

So, too, with the much heralded peace education programs. They have not materialized, certainly not to the extent anticipated. Where serious efforts have been made to incorporate the pastoral and its teachings into school and parish programs, they are usually of brief duration and often do not reach those most in need of exposure. The attempt to monitor the activities of the various dioceses was at best half-hearted, too restricted in scope, and terminated much too soon.

As their work progresses on the forthcoming pastoral, the members of the Weakland committee would do well to take full account of these failures and resolve to avoid their repetition. It is not too late to redeem the peace pastoral as well. It would be a simple matter for the U.S.C.C. to establish a select committee of "blue ribbon," objective experts charged with the task of producing annual reports of advances and setbacks, taking the bishops' "not-so-strict" conditions as its standard of measurement. Indeed, this might well be a recommendation for the economics pastoral. After all, the Holy See's 1976 condemnation of the arms race as "a crime against the poor" makes this issue relevant to their deliberations, too.

A renewed effort to establish a truly full-scale program of peace studies should be given high priority in every diocese as evidence that the bishops were sincere in their commitment. To carry this a step further, commemoration of World Peace Day could be the occasion for a special collection for the

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purpose of sponsoring and supporting peace activity of various kinds. It is a tragic inconsistency which finds Catholic organizations devoted to the objectives set forth by our bishops in so formal a fashion forced to operate in a constant state of financial crisis. To borrow Cardinal Bernardin's "seamless garment" metaphor, one need but compare the funds budgeted by the dioceses and by the U.S.C.C. for "pro-life" organizations and activities with those devoted to justice and peace to recognize the inadequacy of the episcopal commitment to the latter.

The "Challenge of Peace" made a distinct contribution when it clearly set forth the conditions to be met before any actual war can be regarded as "just." By including these explicit conditions in a document intended for the pastoral guidance of all the Catholic faithful, the bishops freed the issue of the morality of modern war from the more limited realm of specialized theological disputation and opened it to the judgment of the individual conscience.

To little avail, however, if one is to judge by the almost total disregard of these conditions with respect to the U.S. invasion of Grenada. Few voices were raised to question the proportionality of full-scale military action, including aerial bombings, to "free" some medical students from factually unsubstantiated danger. Who could claim, by even the most devious of arguments, that military action was undertaken as "a last resort"? Nor was protest voiced by spokespersons for the hierarchy.

Cynicism aside, the failure of the bishops to insist upon an active and effective application of the principles elaborated in their 1983 pastoral threatens to undermine any claim to episcopal credibility. Furthermore, by failing to display a greater measure of persistence and dedication the bishops have left "the challenge of peace" unmet. Can they expect those to whom the pastoral was addressed to do any better? And what does this bode for the future of their proposed letter on the economy?

As already suggested, it is still possible for the bishops to reverse course and demonstrate by action that they meant what they declared at Chicago in 1983. Only if this is done, and soon, will the forthcoming companion pastoral be assured the serious attention it deserves.

THE NEED FOR SUITABLE MUSIC

When the congregation prays twice

THOMAS DAY

AT ONE POINT in his monumental book *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (English translation, 1951), Joseph A. Jungmann departed from his scholarly neutrality and grumbled. The insertion of the "Stabat Mater" into one of the liturgies in the *Missale Romanum* bothered him. This long poem, he complained, did not belong in the Mass because it exhibits an emotional character "that is not properly liturgical, an accent that is emotionally lyrical rather than hymnic, and . . . it shows traces of individual piety," something which is not compatible with "the objective spirit of common prayer."

How quaint those words sound today. Imagine: there was a time when liturgists fretted about the "Stabat Mater" taking away the "objective" character so necessary in a liturgy that is open to all the faithful. Today, American Catholicism is being flooded by "subjective" music that far surpasses the majestic "Stabat Mater" in emotional lyricism and emphasis on "individual piety." Perhaps the most conspicuous place to find such music is in the works of the St. Louis Jesuits and the widely distributed publication *Glory and Praise*, which contains many of their works. It even shows up now in some of the more cautious parish missalettes. It's all over the place.

"What has happened to you people?" an atheist acquaintance asked me after attending a liturgy which featured wall-to-wall folk music in the St. Louis Jesuits' mode. "When did you Catholics turn to mush?"

"Well," I explained, "this is a rather long story. It did not happen overnight."

Twenty-five years ago the Catholic laity in the United States usually encountered two types of worship in their churches: the Latin Mass — objective, remote, austere, often without the panache found in the Catholic churches of continental Europe; and the private devotion, such as the novena. The music for the Latin liturgy had to have a "universal" quality or appeal, since this was a "common prayer" for all humanity; the sung words referred to "us" and "we." The private devotions were another matter. They provided an opportunity for a more personal religious experience. The words "I" and "me" occurred constantly in the much-loved novena hymns.

Those of us who were around then remember that in most churches the novenas had all the memorable tunes. According to a whole pile of papal pronouncements, the objective Latin

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liturgy was also supposed to have good tunes — Gregorian chant, classic polyphony, great organ music, and, most important, congregational participation. But only a small number of American Catholics ever encountered anything so vigorous in their parish churches. In time, the inevitable happened. You might say that the music of the objective Latin liturgy (pathetically undernourished in most places) and the music of the private devotion fought for the loyalty of the people. The novena hymns won a clear majority. The sweetly sentimental novena music, not the heritage of Catholicism's sacred music, became the music of the Catholic laity. Ask laypeople over forty to name the imperishable, the traditional masterpieces of Catholic church music, and many of them will answer, "Mother, At Your Feet Is Kneeling," "To Jesus, Heart All Burning," "O Lord, I Am Not Worthy," and "Mother Dearest." At one time, you heard this type of music in nearly every Catholic church in the nation — even at the supremely tasteful, high society wedding of Senator and Mrs. John F. Kennedy. A few years ago, when I happened to tune into a broadcast from the Catholic Traditionalists, I noticed that the background music for the old Latin Mass consisted of these mildewed Victorian favorites, not Gregorian chant.

The more things change, the more they remain the same. With a continuity that is stunning in its logic, the spirit of the old kitsch novena hymns lives on, stronger than ever, in the parish folk Mass, in the gentle pieces by the singing priests and nuns, and in a large number of newer hymns that have entered the standard repertory of the Catholic parish. That same sweet sentimentality, that same tender emotionalism of the old kitsch hymns is experiencing a revival today. The St. Louis Jesuits' *Glory and Praise*, the Weston Monks, and many others pick up where "To Jesus Heart All Burning" left off. The only major difference between the old novena favorites and the newer versions is a matter of intensity. The St. Louis Jesuits have retained the whole ethos behind "Mother, At Your Feet" and simply speeded up the metabolism. As a result, new parish folk Masses often turn out to be the old parish novena with slightly more zest.

WHAT COULD BE called the *problem* with the music of the Kitsch Revival is not a matter of taste or sincerity, but suitability. Like their musical ancestors — the old novena hymns — the new music displays an egotism, an intense preoccupation with "me," which undermines the very idea of a people gathered together for "common prayer."

Listen, for example, to the much performed "Prayer of St. Francis." The founder of the Franciscans would have been the first to insist that his deeply felt and introspective prayer does not easily fit into that "objective spirit" of liturgy which Jungmann referred to, and is best left a private matter. Besides, the words, when magnified in song and proclaimed in public, can sound like an obnoxious form of boasting, an inventory of *my* spiritual greatness.

"Let There Be Peace on Earth" proposes the very un-Christian idea that true peace on earth begins with "me," not God. "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" presents each member of the congregation as a candidate for canonization. "Whatsoever You Do" starts out with good intentions, but its message can be interpreted as follows: "I, a person of extraordinary Christian virtue, do this and I do that. As payment for my unfailing, heroic saintliness, I automatically earn my salvation." Redemption never enters into the picture.

When the music of the Kitsch Revival is not congratulating the individual for living a life of heroic Christian virtue, it is stressing the believer's deeply personal relationship with God — or, to be more accurate, what God will do for "me." "Be not Afraid," "Only a Shadow," and "Stay with Me," to name just a few selections from *Glory and Praise*, all tell of a very intimate love story. (The old novena hymns did the same thing.) This is a story that must always be told in the spoken word and in song, but the music of the Kitsch Revival tells it in a personal, private way that does not belong in "common prayer," no matter how many scriptural phrases the song contains. The moaning and self-caressing tone of the music indicates that the main character in this story (and perhaps the main character at this liturgy) is really "me." The very personal style effectively turns any liturgy into a club meeting — not the *agape* in the upper room or catacombs, but the gathering of individual "me's" who seem to be going through a form of group therapy. "I'm OK, You're OK, God's OK," in that order, defines the values of the club's lifestyle.

I think I finally understood what had happened to liturgical renewal when I read about a new Catholic church in Illinois. To remind the congregation of its importance, the entire sanctuary had been lined with mirrors. Liturgical renewal — and especially the folk Mass phenomenon — runs the risk of using liturgy as a kind of spiritual mirror, into which the individual worshiper gazes and thoroughly approves of the image. Catholics are supposed to believe that salvation, true peace, and love begin with God's saving grace; you would never guess it from some of our music. You would think it all begins with the person in the mirror.

In many ways, the "me" preoccupation of the Kitsch Revival only reflects an egocentrism found in the official liturgical texts translated from the Latin and prepared by the International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). A brilliant article by Richard Toporoski, "The Language of Worship" (*Communio*, 1977; partially reprinted in *Worship*, 1978), shows how many of the ICEL translations distort the original texts so that more emphasis will be put on "me." For example, the original Latin collects of the Mass contain phrases that could be accurately translated as "graciously grant" and "beseech." The ICEL translations, as Toporoski shows, systematically eliminate all such deferential language. Instead, the Creator is spoken to in a frank, forthright manner, almost as one equal to another, even a businessperson being addressed in a Dear Sir letter. Toporoski demonstrates that American Catholic liturgical texts are tinged with Pelagianism — a heresy which holds an idea of salvation in which, another author maintains, we are the chief agents, or at any rate equal partners in association with God.

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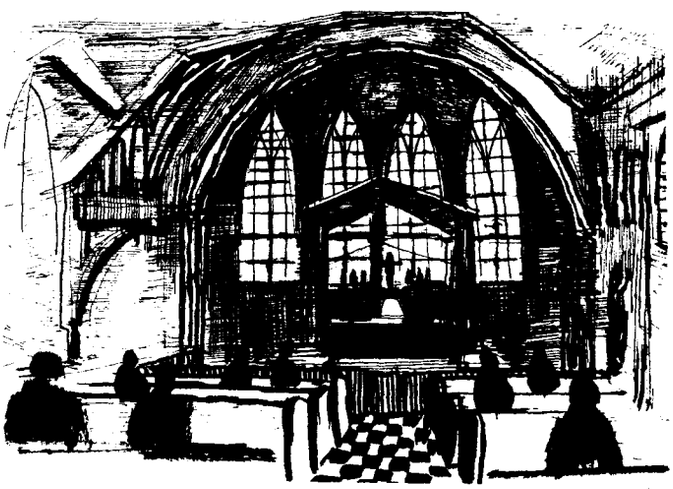
THERE WAS a time when few dared to utter a negative word about the Kitsch Revival. Its credentials were impressive. It stood for *today* — the music of our time, "what the people today really want." When we hear this line of reasoning, we must balance it with the facts of history. The old kitsch hymns were very "with it" in their day. Indeed, you can glide easily from "Mother, Dear, Oh Pray for Me" right into "The Sidewalks of New York" and "Bicycle Built for Two." Slow down the tempo of an old saloon ballad like "She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" and you have the musical style that produced nearly every novena hymn ever written.

If the hymns of the old kitsch look back to the pop tune and waltz of the Gay Nineties for inspiration, the newer kitsch finds its model in the pop folk ballad, and in a rather dated variety at that. *Glory and Praise* carries on the traditions of a crooning style established by a Bing Crosby or Perry Como, blended with the folk idiom popular in the sixties. This, of course, is still much admired, but anyone who has ever turned a television dial knows that "what the people today really want" in music comes in thousands of styles.

Nor do the extravagant claims that groups such as the St. Louis Jesuits write ideal music for congregational use hold up in court. Open *Glory and Praise* or the music of the Weston Monks at almost any page. You will find songs that are treacherously difficult for an ordinary congregation. Those rests (where the congregation must pause and wait for the precise moment to enter again), those pitches (held slightly beyond human endurance), and those easygoing melodies (notated in rather tricky rhythms) all indicate that this is not really music to be sung by "the assembly," that common gathering of humanity united in "common prayer." Indeed, what we have is music for the trained soloist or group — those warm, wonderful people who are always conspicuously displayed up front, thriving on attention. The congregation merely *assists*.

A simple hymn for congregation, such as "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name," stands on its own. Even when given a plain, homely performance in a small church, it comes across as the voice of the congregation in sung prayer. "Hail Mary: Gentle Woman," from *Glory and Praise*, depends entirely on the mediation of the admired soloist or soloists for its effect. By itself, no ordinary congregation can manage to drift along with such an unpredictable melody. Musical whimsy is exceedingly difficult for a large group of people to duplicate.



"But it's so beautiful," I am told about "Hail Mary: Gentle Woman." Indeed it is. The piece is a gem — when we listen to it or watch a soloist use it to express his or her devotion. But congregational music is not a matter of watching; liturgy is a public endeavor, not an occasion for us to fall in love with someone else's individual piety.

"Us liturgy" vs. "me liturgy," the objective corporate act of worship that tries to transcend all the things that divide people vs. the club meeting of the like-minded — Christians have been arguing about this for centuries. Protestant denominations have split again and again over this very issue. In the past, Roman Catholicism compromised: people could indulge in all kinds of private devotions to satisfy a need for a more personal form of worship, but the ritual of the Mass remained "objective," in theory at least, for the multitude. Today, that old compromise still endures with some new twists. Upstairs, in the main church, many parishes have the "objective" liturgies for everyone, while downstairs in the basement the folk Mass lets loose. Unfortunately, what also prevails is a system of values that has hardly changed in thirty years. The upstairs liturgy, like the sung Latin Mass of years ago, has settled into a listless routine. The music, the homily, everything gets the once-over-lightly; the nourishing eucharistic meal becomes a quick snack. Downstairs has all the energy, and some very good tunes.

Most parishes do not resort to the upstairs-downstairs compromise. They try earnestly to keep all their liturgies public events and "catholic" in the original meaning of the word. Nobody knows the precise formula. Small churches find they have the most success using simple hymns. In the vast spaces of cathedrals it makes sense to use the great masterpieces of music. But this much is certain: the Kitsch Revival does not help matters. It trains people to think of liturgy as the glorification of all the "me's" in the small, homogeneous groups; it promotes snobbery and elitism. The people downstairs who sing about peace and love often turn out to be alarmingly intolerant of any style of worship which does not conform to their laid-back cultural values; they will tell you openly that any type of religious music which does not sound like the St. Louis Jesuits is hypocritical and should only be kept as a temporary concession to the elderly.

According to a worst-case scenario, upstairs Catholicism will become the Church of Convenience: quick, efficient, the riches of liturgical renewal dispensed with an eyedropper. Parishioners who hunger for a more substantial expression of faith will have no choice but to go downstairs. But a best-case scenario has the extremes learning from one another. The upstairs crowd discovers that singing can be a healthy form of religious joy; occasionally, they work up a good charismatic sweat when they worship, using dignified, conventional sacred music, even Gregorian chant. The downstairs people finally outgrow their preoccupation with themselves; they

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consciously avoid any form of worship that looks like a personality contest or a vehicle for the local star performers.

Whatever happens in the future, the church which calls itself "universal" will have to keep its doors open to young, old, poor, rich, sophisticated, unsophisticated, and more ethnic groups than can be counted. A liturgy that proceeds with objective solemnity and a great sense of purpose will always remain the most effective way for that complex assortment of people to pray as one.

Screen

DIFFERENT SUNDAYS

MRS. SOFFEL & THE ARTIST

MRS. SOFFEL should be seen, but not heard. Although based on a true story, the film's plot seems incredible — or at least incredibly naive in its countercultural assumptions about our sympathies. It is thoughtful, to be sure; the only problem is that the thoughts come about ten years too late to do anything but annoy. The title character is a demure turn-of-the-century prison warden's wife (Diane Keaton) who visits prisoners to solace or convert them with Bible readings. Instead, a notoriously handsome devil of the period (Mel Gibson) lights her fire, and gets her to pass him handsaws between Psalms and Proverbs. Once she helps him escape, *Mrs. Soffel* becomes a late Victorian *Bonnie and Clyde*, complete with gory, boring shoot-out.

What redeems the film somewhat is the cinematography. The movie was made on location at the antique Allegheny County prison, a masterpiece of Henry Hunt Richardson that one critic called "the most outstanding example of prison architecture in America." It looks the role, with its solemnity, heavy marble and granite, dim lighting, and iron doors whose gothic clink is here both convincing and scary. One powerful central image dominates: a bridge of sighs, modeled on Venice's, which links jail and court, and which is neatly and symmetrically crossed at the open and close of the film. Director Gillian Armstrong has positioned her cameras to make sure that each frame is filled with bars, preferably several rows, to accentuate enclosure. Although the prison never becomes symbolic (for Mrs. Soffel makes her own predicament), its sheer visual power compensates somewhat for the story's shortcomings.

The story is as real as the setting (once nicknamed "Hotel Soffel"), but the screenplay doesn't make its heroine's recklessness convincing or admirable. She is not in the least oppressed: her husband is mild-mannered and tolerable, her children charming. Armstrong, who previously made *My Brilliant Career*, probably meant *Mrs. Soffel* to document a fiercely independent gesture; instead, it merely seems like willful self-destruction. The only reason for Diane Keaton to

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throw her life away is Mel Gibson's incredible hulk, which, literally, sweeps her off her feet, hardly a feminist pose. Gibson, in turn, catches her self-destructive bug when he takes her with him on his perilous journey north. As a result, when they're caught, one hardly cares. The last two decades of witnessing the joys of martyrdom have apparently worn on my sympathy.

Indeed, on closer look, *Mrs. Soffel* explains why the last two decades have also brought both law-and-order and sexual backlash. Keaton, for example, is far more believable as a lovestruck heroine than a Bible reader — in part because romantic suffering is her natural shtick (cf. *Reds, Shoot the Moon*, etc.), but in part, one suspects, because neither she nor director Armstrong really believes that reading the Bible could be a heartfelt act or anything more than a mindless pose. So much for religion. As far as family is concerned, the structure of the plot implies that you really don't have to explain why someone would leave it: exits need not be *justified* because the filmmakers' ideology assumes that a family can't be justified in the first place.

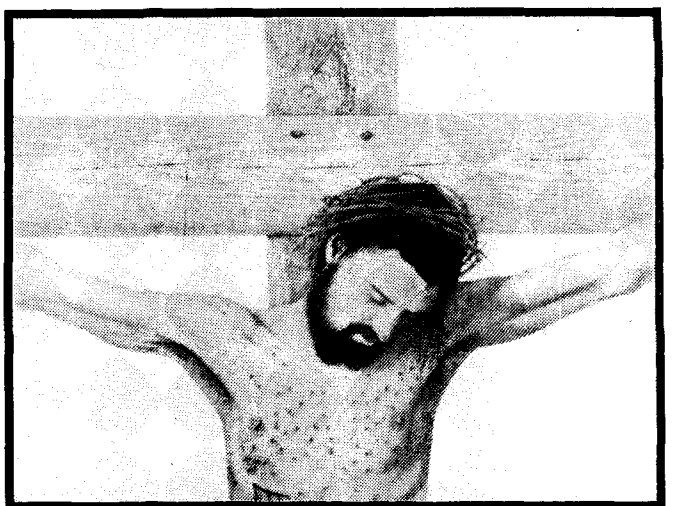
The ideology behind the film, in short, isn't just passé; it illustrates the knee-jerk assumptions still so prevalent among liberal intellectuals. In casually assuming that family and religion repress the self, they help foster approaches to family and religion which do. Long ago, Wordsworth wrote of such enlightened skeptics that they seem to prefer being "enemies to Falsehood than friends to truth." The delights of deconstruction are always much more seductive than creative faith.

To be sure, religious and family pieties—like prayer itself—may seem false or hollow when imposed as routine or adhered to mindlessly; that doesn't mean pieties contain no truth or sacred value. The hubris of the intellectual left — perfectly illustrated in *Mrs. Soffel* and the praise for it in some very high film circles — is its permanent, perhaps terminal, case of half-think on such subjects. It's such neglect of whole truths that builds us right-wing prisons.

BY CONTRAST, Bertrand Tavernier's *A Sunday in the Country* reveals much of what it means to belong to a real family. The film focuses on a father — a retired painter who made competence, not creativity, the hallmark of his late nineteenth-century career. Tavernier understates the artistic theme at first, and concentrates instead on the painter's family: a dutiful, plodding son and a romantic, unpredictable daughter who, true to the title, show up at their father's country home one Sunday. But Tavernier's method allows him to mine great riches from this simple source, treating, with an absolute evenness of tone, need and rejection, family foibles and fatigue, sentiment and *ressentiment*, ingratitude and bittersweet love. The film is a marvel of nuance and balance.

At first glance, however, *A Sunday in the Country* may seem too slight, and I'll confess that I went (one Sunday in the city) with some trepidation, expecting perhaps, another pretty French film with period costumes where not much happens, another snooze-in-love. Nevertheless, Tavernier does enough in the slow build-up of the tale to sustain dramatic expectation. A spoken line over the initial blank screen — "You demand too much of life, Irene." — contains some mystery; only later do we discover it was spoken to the daughter by the painter's deceased wife. Tavernier scatters a few symbols about; Irene is first seen in crisply edited shots as she drives one of Paris's first fancy autos up some country lanes, disturbing their pastoral quiet; instantly we divine she moves too fast, exactly the way she whirlwinds in and out of her father's life. Periodically, Tavernier also breaks from his simple narrative by playing with time, with flash forwards as the son fantasizes his father's death, or flashbacks involving the dead mother, the "Rebecca" of the film. Occasionally, Tavernier also substitutes a panning shot for a straightforward camera angle, and thus we are introduced to the artist's studio, a range of pretty trivialities without a dominant center. With such slight shifts of tone, sequence, and angle, Tavernier prevents his period realism from becoming soporific, and creates a pace which allows his vignettes to assemble slowly to a full mosaic.

Tavernier's method, moreover, permits him to depict a variety of ways of existing in a family: growing old, growing up, exercising authority, being mischievous, feeling neglected, or craving attention. He first concentrates on the visit of the son and his family, a mélange including two boisterous boys and a younger, frailer daughter. The boys provide consistent, only slightly overworked slapstick as they chase innocent animals, wrestle, and scamper about. The girl is seen, in a beautiful sequence filmed in the half-light of a country



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kitchen, laying strips of dough in careful lines across a patterned pastry under the guidance of the painter's crone-like housekeeper. More complicated is the tangle of relations involving the old man (Louis Ducreux) and his plain and somber son (Michel Aumont) and daughter-in-law (Genevieve Mnich): the latter resents his jesting at their seriousness; she also yearns to be close, and once runs up to help him as he walks unsurely, a gesture which is both awkward and perfectly genuine.

The arrival of Irene (Sabine Azema) changes the tempo of the film and deepens the complexities. She affectionately assaults the place, unleashing her pet poodle ("Caviar"), embraces the girl in a vise, stirs up her nephews' precocious sexuality, and prods her father into an earnest search in his ancient attic for some old shawls for her trinket store. The father clearly prefers the daughter to the son; everyone sees it, and the son hardly begrudges it, except when insisting, in a fit of pique, that his sister pay for the shawls. These people like each other; they reach out for each other and offer some level of understanding and forgiveness, but they miss each other too. We are told at one point that, although the father loves Irene the most, he resents her infrequent visits and ingratitude. Equally obvious, and somewhat painful, is his own evident ingratitude toward his son. In depicting both the generosity and inadequacy of such characters, Tavernier establishes their reality which — in memories of Sundays in the country or the city — may come to seem yours too.

The family theme and the art theme are merged in Tavernier's most brilliant change of pace. After staging all the action at the old man's estate, he has Irene take her father for a drive to a lakeside restaurant, where they sit and discuss an old painting they found among the shawls, his youthful and very romantic rendition of a girl on a tightrope, the only one of his works that Irene has ever really liked. But at the restaurant he expounds on his choice not to paint in an experimental manner. He knew Renoir and Cézanne, he tells Irene, and neighbored Van Gogh "one summer in Arles." He declined their lead, he says: it would have been unoriginal to have aped someone else's originality. Instead, he labored modestly, followed the rules, and one notes — though he fails to add — wound up with a home in the country. His daughter — his Van Gogh, so to speak, compared to his son the academician — responds in character by leading him to dance.

So many issues congregate in this scene, a great family gathering of ideas. Tavernier's neutral tone allows us to examine the issues — romanticism vs. belonging, adventure vs. commerce, masculine and feminine roles in a conventional society — without clichés. The old man pulls no neurotic "Andrea del Sarto" routine out of Browning; he is clear-eyed about the choice that he made and makes us wonder if, indeed, it was so bad. I was reminded most of Plato's *Symposium*, where he says artists are "pregnant of soul" and asks, "which would you rather have — natural children or the children of Homer and Hesiod?" To its credit, while registering the inadequacy of these children, *A Sunday in the Country* refuses to answer the question simply.

TOM O'BRIEN

WHO COULD HAVE GUESSED THE DANGERS?

Mergansers in the fog

JAMES M. DINN

JUST A surge of water, an enveloping velocity, thunder and silence. Probably not time enough for awareness or panic. It was over for most of them in an instant. But it haunted me to realize that ducks could drown, that they could be blind to elemental forces, that they needed to be warned.

The item in the paper was as brief as the bizarre event itself. Thousands of wild ducks had been swept over Niagara Falls to their death, apparently blinded to the danger by a rare winter fog. Mergansers they were, American mergansers.

There was nothing but rough hummocked ice at the time on the stretch of Lake Erie outside my window, but I looked reflexively. It was a couple of weeks since they had lingered here in frigid congealing water, diving between the ice floes. That's the amazing part. They were diving ducks, not your garden variety tip-ups who scavenge clumsily in the shallows to extract tidbits from the mud. These were sleek deep-water birds with serrated fish-holding beaks and the unkempt casual crests of seasoned professionals. More than once they had amused my wife and me with their effortless ease in water. They attracted the gulls sometimes, whether by their lordly airs or by surfacing with a trophy fish we couldn't tell. But a clownish game of tag would ensue, gulls hovering and swooping each time a merganser's head broke water. It continued typically until the gulls quit out of discouragement or embarrassment. But the roles never reversed. The gulls were always "it"; the ducks were always the quarry, skillfully taunting, always eluding, seemingly totally secure in the water.

Strange now to muse when their danger might have begun. We're over a hundred miles from the Falls here. I mean, one would scarcely feel impelled, at such a point where there isn't really a perceptible current, to play gamekeeper and to try to goad the birds into the air. Rather foolish on the face of it.

But somewhere between here and the critical precipice there must be a point where the current begins to dramatically accelerate. I've often wondered about fish under those circumstances, but I

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never thought about ducks. Somehow they seemed impervious to the risk. Presumably they, too, would be wary of any circumstance where the current was stronger than themselves. And they have the ultimate escape — they could fly.

How often we had watched whole flocks of them swimming in November. The flocks would casually drift with the wind, floating comfortably as a loose-knit group for half a mile or more. Then they would take to the air, beam back to their starting point, and settle down for another drift.

They could presumably dare the very brink of the waterfall and launch effortlessly into the air. The *deus ex machina* was part of their standard portfolio. Even beyond the brink, for all I knew, they might brake their descent at will and be airborne.

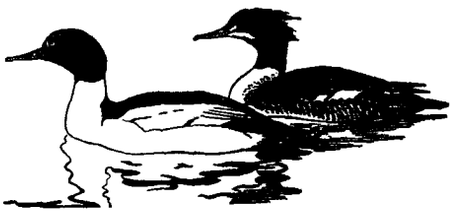
Evidently the fog betrayed them. Perhaps they needed visual cues to realize how far they had drifted and how fast the current moved. One might have thought some tactile cue, some kinesthetic sense, would have told them. But apparently they needed sightings, bearings on some fixed point, to notify them of their peril. You wonder if some had an inkling, if any tried alerting others. You wonder if the leaders laughed at the timid. You wonder if past successes in fast water had made them feel falsely secure. You wonder if anyone could have engaged their attention long enough to save them from their inertia and avert the disaster.

I used to worry, like Holden Caulfield, about ducks in winter. It was an innocent concern about where they might go, what they could eat. Adults reassured me about the efficacy of migration and instincts, and I believed them. Besides, despite my fears I had never known a duck to actually get caught in ice. So with time I had grown less fearful and more confident of their well-being. Never in my worst fears had I thought they could be hurt by their own element.

Permeating the event is a haunting sense of treachery in the safe and familiar. Birds are not alone in presuming on a certain sanctuary in their lives. We all have zones within which we feel confident, relaxed, and secure. Tragedies which belie that confidence have a special poignancy.

Who could have thought that of all the unspeakable horrors and risks of the Vietnam War its veterans, a decade later, would feel most compromised by a chemical that removed foliage? It had probably seemed the safest item they handled, the most humane weapon in their arsenal.

Who could have guessed the extent of the risks of picking produce in our orchards and fields? Who anticipated the dangers of plastics and asbestos, the contaminants in our wells, the acid rain falling on our forests and lakes, the toxins in the air we breathe? We had always assumed that danger wore an alien face, that we would be forewarned by its unfamiliarity.



Like the mergansers we too are betrayed by the elements we trusted. No line of demarcation defines the danger zone. No alarm is sounded. Of course we would have ignored alarms anyway. Americans are the people who print warnings on the cigarettes which we continue to smoke; we tune out or turn off the seat belt buzzers in our cars; we are deluged with diet warnings but overdose on fried franchised foods.

At the same time we are reluctant to sound an alarm, to declare an emergency, to attempt a rescue, to summon help. Truthfully, we are afraid of seeming absurd. We are perfectly capable of heroism, but there is nothing heroic in being a smoke alarm which sounds off whenever the toaster is used. It is inhibition, more than callousness or cowardice, which keeps us from being Good Samaritans. We see the limp figure on the ground beside the road, but it occurs to us that he may not be injured, is simply resting. And we might seem foolish if we overreact.

On Notre Dame campus some years ago I thought I heard a cry for help. But it seemed so implausible on that balmy June morning that I couldn't take it seriously. When it was repeated I started walking (not running!) toward the nearer of two small lakes. Yet I felt more foolish with every step, passing students who were lounging on the lawn or strolling unconcerned. Everything was so casual, so normal. It was preposterous to think anyone was in danger. Only one other person reached the lake before I did, and fortunately he had already helped the exhausted swimmer to shore.

The sense of the ordinary and familiar so disarms us that clear evidence of distress or danger is misinterpreted. I almost watched my younger brother drown when we were boys. I was envying his fun as I mistook for playing his desperate thrashing before losing consciousness. Trying to join the game I happened into the same spring-hole, and my own floundering attracted a rescuer for both of us. I had never suspected he was in trouble. It was a crowded, guarded little beach area at a small lake, familiar and safe.

Not surprisingly, with a sense of security in familiar elements and a reluctance to take alarm, we collectively smile at history and plunge casually into its swiftest currents, calmly braving its surges and eddies, frolicking in the turbulence of its power. Buoyed by irrepressible confidence, we hope for the future rather than plan for it: speculating rather than investing. We are all-too-willing to gamble. Puzzled by weakness, inspired by need, hurt by rebuff, we are younger than our years. More dreamers than diplomats, visionaries without blueprints, we magnify significance, underestimate complexity, and trust in the efficacy of good intentions. Pragmatists who have elevated expediency to the level of principle, we grope for fixed norms to test our bearings. Struggling for equilibrium, overburdened with armaments, we lean heavily on our missiles and push against the current. We are, in a word, Americans.

So were they also — *American* mergansers.

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Books: STILL LOST IN THE MAZE

SOLSTICE
Joyce Carol Oates
Dutton, $15.95, 243 pp.

EQUAL DISTANCE
Brad Leithauser
Knopf, $17.95, 351 pp.

Robert Jones

IN the foreword to *Them*, Joyce Carol Oates writes of the woman she knew in Detroit who became the basis for her character, Maureen Wendall. Her initial feeling about the details of "Maureen's" life was, "This must be fiction, this can't all be real." But this reaction was followed by her more permanent response, "This is the only kind of fiction that is real." What astonished her then, and has continued to astonish her through twelve subsequent novels, is that what she writes is true, that our most gruesome fantasies occur as natural behavior. The act of writing fiction, even at its most fantastic, is, for Oates, the means by which the imagination gives voice to reality.

Joyce Carol Oates is our most prolific, serious writer. Her output of poems, novels, essays, and short stories has become a sort of joke among readers who presume writing to be serious only if it exacts authorial collapse. What is missing from most critical judgment is that Oates, despite her occasional narrative wobbles, is the most relentless chronicler of America and its nightmares since Poe. But while Poe is a master of hallucination as it infringes on the world, Oates has become, in the course of one hundred years of culture, our most severe realist. Fevers and obsessions exist in her work merely as the prelude to the realities of mass murder, assassination, and political betrayal. Her experiments with style, from the contemporary gore of *Wonderland* to the gothic excess of *Bellefleur*, are all part of a single attempt to find the form which best articulates the increasingly unreal character of twentieth-century experience.

But this is not to suggest that Oates believes in sentimental myths of progress or decline. The point is not so much that the world has changed for the worse, but that it has come into its own, something like an adolescent passing into achieved sophistication. What Oates accomplishes in her fiction is to trace the traditions of malice and treachery as they occur in our public and private lives. As the epigraph to *Angel of Light*, Oates chose an eighteenth-century quotation from Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees*. "What we call evil in this world, moral as well as natural, is the grand principle that makes us sociable creatures . . . the moment evil ceases, the society must be spoiled if not totally dissolved." Evil is necessary and expected. The problems inherent in history are neither nature nor God, but the human being seated next to you at dinner.

This is the point of the Atreus-like fall of the Hallecks in *Angel of Light*, of the ignominious Zinn family in *A Bloodsmoor Romance*, or of the legacy of Andrew Petrie in *The Assassins*. Political history and tradition are always the subplot to the quivering of individual souls in isolation. All narratives, from the history of culture to the most idiosyncratic familial squabble, speak of the power of desire and the tyranny of love. And in her new novel, *Solstice*, Oates has written her most complex tale of the perversity of human emotion to date.

Monica Jensen is in flight from an ordinary life. When she meets Sheila Trask in *Solstice*, she believes that she has found the person who will lead her to something extraordinary. Sheila has the unerring instinct of all true predators who find fragility an irresistible invitation to plunder. She tells Monica, "You have that dazed, precarious look . . . as if you were carrying your life in a pyramid of eggs." For her part, Monica becomes lost in the thrill of discovering someone who seems to understand her completely. They become inseparable. Soon Monica begins to attend to the necessary details of Sheila's life so that she might be free to finish a series of nine paintings. The canvases are to be called "Ariadne's Thread."

When Ariadne offered Theseus the clew that led him out of the labyrinth, the last thing she expected was to be abandoned by him. Their legend is paradigmatic of our most misplaced ideas of selflessness and love: the belief that if we provide others with umbilical cords, our reward will be a lifetime of faithfulness. On some level, Ariadne and Theseus is a parable about the risks inherent in all relationships. And in the development of Monica's friendship with Sheila, Oates brilliantly evokes how easily our desire to love becomes a willingness to accept obsession and grief. Sheila has the heartiness and the inexhaustible cunning of the best monsters, but Monica exhibits as relentless a drive to skewer herself with passion. Yet she is also guileless. She fails to understand that Theseus gambled a trust as great as Ariadne's. For had Sheila Trask been Ariadne, she would have led him deeper inside the labyrinth only to yank the thread from his fingers once he was most hopelessly lost.

And so it happens with Monica. As with many love stories, Monica's frenzy accelerates in step with Sheila's detachment. But the novel's distinction is that it shows the complexity of emotion in even the most destructive relationships. Sheila's malevolence and Monica's innocence always reflect upon their generosity and guilt.

"Solstice" usually refers to changes of seasons and the earth's relation to the sun. But it can also mean a turning point, a culmination, or a furthest distance. *Solstice* tells of the lengths we travel in pursuit of love and the myths of escape we misunderstand as freedom. Near the end, lost in the boxwood maze on the grounds of the school where she teaches, Monica learns what Theseus discovered in the labyrinth: that slaying the monster is only a prelude to getting out, that most

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changes of direction curve to another dead end.

If the writing at times seems rushed, if the end to the novel comes abruptly, this fable of Monica's journey to the boxwood maze is free of the ponderousness that sometimes weakens Oates's fiction. And happily, her conjuring of a menacing sense of dread remains undiminished. *Solstice* is her best novel, a macabre comedy about coming of age in a world where innocence exists as a failure of intelligence.

Brad Leithauser's first novel, *Equal Distance*, concerns a coming of age of a more traditional variety, a young man's sojourn abroad as he travels from Harvard to Japan. *Equal Distance* celebrates an easier world, one in which the passing from adolescence to uncertain adulthood is achieved with a degree of trauma suitable for letters in a family circular. Monica's initiation in *Solstice* speaks of venturing into a life made terrifying by its tenuous boundaries. It is a world that Danny Ott in *Equal Distance* has not begun to imagine.

Three years ago, Brad Leithauser published the widely-praised *Hundreds of Fireflies*. The poems in that collection are notable for their evocation of nature's ability to startle and compel. They move from image to image with a sureness of perception that is consistently astonishing. But whenever Leithauser leaves glimpses of rocks and swans and stars for an extended narrative, the poetry derails. As a writer, he lacks a sense of what is interesting. The long poem at the volume's center, "Two Summer Jobs," describes in bewildering detail the poet's tenure as a law clerk and tennis instructor. While technically efficient, it is stunted emotionally, and this same failure of imagination undermines Leithauser's accomplishment in *Equal Distance*.

During his year in Japan, Danny Ott thinks of nothing but home. Whether jogging through the streets of Tokyo, lying in bed, or drinking in Kyoto bars, Danny prattles obsessively about the two events that have changed him: his admission to Harvard and his parents' impending divorce. Danny has gone abroad to reflect upon his life and to change. But at his moment of greatest despair near his story's end, he exclaims, "Let them all go. Let Mom marry a shoe repair man, if that's what she really wanted, and Dad take up with a stripper: Go ahead: Let the whole thing collapse."

At twenty-three, Danny's understanding of doom stalls at the petulance of a thwarted child. The novel suffers from the backward glance of an adolescent who believes everything that happens to him matters to the world. To perceive broader, historical significance in a family's saga, as Oates does in *Angel of Light*, is something different than to affirm the unraveling of the universe in a divorce. If Oates sees individual tragedy as symbolic of the loss of a larger world, her novels succeed because she enables the reader to imagine that other world. *Equal Distance* suggests that the earth is populated exclusively with Danny Otts. The distances of which Leithauser writes are the shortest possible: a vision pulled forward and diminished under an adolescent eye clamoring for attention.

In his depiction of the strangeness of Japan and the exoticism of its tongue, Leithauser retains his poet's ear for sound and nuance. But his facility with language cripples his narrative. He spends more time saying things beautifully than thinking about what he says.

The series was called 'Ariadne's Thread.' It had to do, Sheila explained, with the idea or memory of a labyrinth, not the actual labyrinth

'In which,' Sheila said mysteriously, 'we don't always believe.' Of the nine canvases only three appeared to be completed. . . . Their colors were muted, subtle – grays shading into mauve, mauve into filmy white – intimations of clouds, a network of nerves, the brain's secret convolutions . . . Monica, staring, her senses almost too painfully alert, supposed she could see a progression of sorts from the earliest canvas to the last. . . . did that mean the laybrinth had been overcome–?

—Joyce Carol Oates
Solstice

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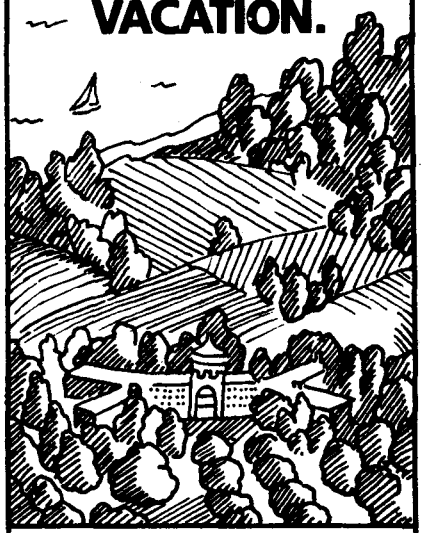

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Each time Japan flickers to life, it is overcome by yet another discussion of Harvard and Mom and Dad back in Michigan.

Danny's dislocation in Asia derives from his inability to conceive of anything larger than home. Tales of innocents abroad are a rite of passage in American fiction. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, the wary traveler leaves her backyard for the danger of foreign territory, only to return fulfilled and changed. In presuming to embrace the world beyond home, such tales often disguise our most xenophobic fantasies. They give us adventure at its most specious and predictable; venturing forth depends upon an eventual return to the fold. Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, for example, panders to majority taste and paranoia while it pretends to mock it. *Equal Distance* lacks the same overriding intelligence which prevents its story from becoming anything more than its narrowest surface. One wants to like Brad Leithauser and to admire his talent, but he risks nothing. *Equal Distance* celebrates nostalgia for an idea of American boyhood that was false when Huck Finn first picked up a paddle to steer his raft downstream.

Human witness, earned advocacy

I, RIGOBERTA MENCHU

AN INDIAN WOMAN
IN GUATEMALA

Edited by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray
Translated by Ann Wright
Schocken Books, $8.95, 251 pp.

SALVADOR WITNESS:

THE LIFE AND CALLING
OF JEAN DONOVAN

Ana Carrigan
Simon and Schuster, $16.95, 324 pp.

THE SAME FATE AS THE POOR

Judith M. Noone, M.M.
Maryknoll Sisters Publication,
$4.95, 150 pp.

John Druska

THE SAME undercurrent, tracing social oppression's role in shaping lives and deaths, runs through these Central American accounts. Rigoberta Menchú's autobiographical monologue shows the oppressed themselves driven to self-awareness and toward self-determination, while the biographical chronicles of four women variously drawn to serve the oppressed reveal how their service drove them deeper into a vocation of identification with the poor, the deprived, the murdered.

Because oppression, revolution, repression have so easily led to capricious and general murder throughout Central American history, these three books brim with death. Against lethal backgrounds — the systematic Okie-like enslavement of Guatemalan Indians, or the 1930s Nicaraguan and Salvadoran slaughters of revolutionaries and restoration of oligarchic power — these stories about natives and North American Christians moved to organize for grass-roots needs seem at times pathetically overshadowed, their heroines foredoomed. In these countries, at least, histories repeat. The same fate is ordained for today's poor and those who stand close to them as in the past.

But these personal histories surprise. Through distillations of suffering, bafflement, and fellow feeling, they bear quixotic witness against predestined death. In one, a protagonist survives to testify abroad. In the others, something testamental assumes life. Nothing in Jean Donovan's conventional youth and short lucrative business career quite prepares us for her later sometimes quirky rejection of conventional expectations and her feisty willingness to risk death for others. *The Same Fate* focuses on Carla Piette's accidental death and Maura Clarke and Ita Ford's murders, and here we sense solidarity reaffirmed, the Maryknoll mission spirit ascendant over the morass El Salvador has become.

Rigoberta Menchú's survival sounds, too, its miraculous note: body and spirit somehow whole and triumphant after passage through inhuman violence and suffering. State-decreed killings claim her parents, her brothers. A married friend, who spurns a landowner's son, gets hacked to pieces while holding her baby. Repressive murders increase with the Indians' awareness that their landless migrant status has made them economic zombies, and in proportion to their efforts to organize for homesteads, whether spiritual or physical.

While many North American press accounts treat Central American conflicts in terms of East-West pawnslips, Menchú speaks out for a disenfranchised *majority* within her country, arguing for tribal cultural rights. She describes a symbiotic attachment to the Gospel's liberating message while insisting on the integrity of Indian ways, each tribe's and person's right to identify as free people with their own cultural history.

Menchú, then, came to draw on Christianity in helping her advocate specific human rights, while Jean Donovan in *Salvador Witness,* and the three Maryknoll Sisters in *The Same Fate,* came to draw on their fieldwork with Indians and the poor as a way of fulfilling Christian ideals. Deeper than the persistent oppression and death in these works runs the forceful current of persons — the mystery of persons radically touching each other — in a way that seldom touches the way nations label each other. The labels come easier.

Insofar as these books take or imply similar stands, they may be called propaganda. They vilify some Central American governments, admire revolutionaries, decry overt and covert U.S. intervention in Latin America. But let's distinguish. This propaganda is personally earned, advocacy growing from the evidence the senses compose rather than from the exigencies of political ideology or policy. What the Maryknolls had seen happen earlier in Chile, for example, suggested a lesson in popular deprivation that cried out to inform their work among the poor elsewhere, a lesson that became of a piece with their experiences in Nicaragua and El Salvador. It's a lesson some of us have a hard time hearing because eyewitness language doesn't fit the "scenarios" some of our leaders choose to broadcast.

The most compelling part of *Salvador*

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Witness is a grimly terse epilogue ("Chronicle of a Cover-up") that reports the efforts to uncover the truth about the churchwomen's deaths. It argues, in Ita Ford's brother Bill's words, that both the Carter and Reagan administrations have had "a fixed policy in Salvador, and that policy will not bend to reason, or eyewitness, or anything else."

Ironically, Carter recently has attacked the Reagan administration's inability to perceive other peoples' valid concerns in the hemisphere, apart from our superimposed labeling. It is the key question all three books raise: the degree to which we, as North American partisans, read other places in the world in self-centered terms. Do we entertain a kind of political pathetic fallacy that denies whole peoples their own characters, inconsistencies, errors, and triumphs — and does this encourage oppressive leaders interested in our financial aid to cater to our projected self-centered illusion?

In presenting other versions of sociopolitical reality, the hortative texts under review are not without their flaws. Burgos-Debray lets stand Menchú's repetitious recollections; Carrigan's prose occasionally romanticizes portentously. Yet in their contexts these stories command respect. Menchú's repetitions assume the power of incantatory refrain, hallowing the lives she remembers — now lost but not quite. Or those quotidian details — the absurdity of Donovan's lunching at McDonald's the afternoon of her last day in El Salvador, or her sometimes banal colloquial musings — they accentuate our bond with her to the commonplace. And the genuine devotion of three nuns' lives to a mission vocation make of their actions — however abbreviated in this account — a convincing single utterance, a prayer raised for us all insofar as we speak and listen as people to other people.

It is not as finely-shaped biography or exhaustive reportage that we value books like these. What's important here is the human witness, the important presences evoked. They force us to place ourselves and our lives in relationship with the lives and deaths they tell. I've read parts of them at leisure, a two-week-old child propped on my lap, and invoked in response Pasolini's filmed vision of King Herod's slaughter. In a local bar I've heard a tourist describe her Mexican vacation as a resort-bound, week-long happy hour and had to imagine Jean Donovan living it up in Cleveland, the world at her disposal, before her conversion to missionary work — and I tried to imagine what mysterious human intricacies made for the change, what determines how close we come to one another's lives and deaths.

The other America, part two

THE NEW AMERICAN POVERTY

Michael Harrington

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $17.95, 271 pp.

Ed Marciniak

THE NAGGING enigma that "the poor are still here" in the 1980s has prompted Harrington to return to the topic of his 1962 classic, *The Other America*. That book supplied the intellectual foundations for the federal "war against poverty" set in motion by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

Harrington now defends that "war" and seeks to rebut its contemporary critics. He is most convincing when he argues that the Office of Economic Opportunity, Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and similar federal initiatives succeeded in reducing the old poverty, but he is far less persuasive in explaining why such measures failed to prevent the epidemic of "new American poverty."

The new poverty is very much on public display, unlike Harrington's invisible poor of the 1960s when suburbanization distanced the middle class from daily contact with poverty and when the Appalachian poor were hidden in mountain hollows. Today, the middle class meets the homeless on city streets or can view, via television, the unemployed in the smokestack industries. Consider the irony in Harrington's account of his visit to Pennsylvania during the winter of 1983:

> I had gone to McKeesport to talk to unemployed steelworkers. . . . At one point I interviewed a woman, whom I took to be a local militant, for ten or so minutes before I discovered that she was a reporter. And I was told that when the last of the three commercial networks arrived to shoot their footage, it had been necessary to call a special picket line to give them something to cover. A bank, mistaking this reenactment for a new demonstration, closed early.

The new poverty is generated by "new structures of misery," not foreseen by Harrington and other anti-poverty warriors in the early 1960s. These structures, it seems are not being dismantled by traditional strategies to rout poverty. Three such structures of misery are the "feminization" of poverty, the "deinstitutionalization" of mental patients, and the rise of a social underclass.

The feminization of social misery and the simultaneous rise in violent crime are conspicuously present in the black community. In the 1980s seventy percent of the nation's black households in poverty are headed by a woman. Fifty-five percent of the births to black women occur out of wedlock. The majority of all black children are being raised by single women. Ensuring the persistence of such poverty are young black males who have not found a place in today's economy.

The deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill resulted in their being dumped on the sidewalks of New York, Chicago, and other cities. In 1955 public mental hospitals housed 559,000 patients; in 1979 there were 146,000.

Still another structure of misery produces the growing underclass "made up of the longterm welfare recipients, the drifters and drug addicts, and the relatively non-violent hustlers of the underground economy." These, along with the female heads of households, are the poor found in high-rise public housing projects across the country.

Harrington singles out "deindustrialization" as the newest structure of misery. This poverty is different from all

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those that preceded it, he insists. "Around 1970, the United States joined the global economy for the first time and the American poor began to suffer from the international division of labor. . . ." Unemployed steelworkers and auto workers, he claims, are in "limbo, a place in-between." He connects their joblessness to modern steel mills in Japan and South Korea. These unemployed are not yet poor and may well rejoin the economic mainstream, but "a significant number of them," he says, "could become poor, particularly the ones forty or older."

With one exception, Harrington's anti-poverty program in 1984 echoes the nostalgic 1960s. His chief goal is planning for full employment, to be realized through a coalition among "trade unionists (20 percent of the work force) . . . blacks (12 percent of the population) . . . [and] all of the poor (15 to 20 percent of the nation. . . ." Such "democratic planning," which terrifies the "simplistic left" and the "shamefaced right," would weigh not only the profit and loss of plant closings but also their social cost. His other recommendations include national health insurance; new incentives for greater participation by the poor as voters; and a federal tax system to redistribute wealth and income, for example, by ending tax benefits for vacation homes and using these dollars for subsidies to house the poor.

Harrington's most intriguing proposal weds self-interest to moral principle: expand U.S. technical assistance and other aid to developing countries in order to boost employment here in the states. There is, he says, "hope for the American poor if this nation would make a serious commitment to abolish the much greater poverty of the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America." The transfer of U.S. technology to these continents, he argues, would expand their buying power for durable goods manufactured in the United States. Unfortunately, this proposal is given sketchy treatment.

Harrington's assessment of the reasons U.S. poverty decreased in the early 1970s leaves vital questions unanswered:

- He never makes clear the precise nature of the link he asserts between an overcrowded municipal shelter in New York City and, for example, the growth of shoemaking in Brazil for export. Is he really saying that New York's homeless formerly held jobs in the shoe, steel, and auto industries?
- Why would the goal of full employment abolish the new poverty? Between 1970 and 1984, the ranks of U.S. employed rose by m;ore than 25 million. Yet during the same period the number of poor began to rise dramatically. Additional goals are needed.
- Is there a connection, for example, between the enduring unemployment of young blacks striving to enter the labor force and the unprecedented inundation of the labor market by married women ever since 1960? Harrington scants the issue. Is it taboo?
- How is his new crusade against poverty to be financed? If his proposals are implemented, a $100 billion estimate of their cost is modest. In the face of gigantic budget deficits, volatile interest rates, huge defense expenditures, and ever-threatening inflation, Harrington's answers are occasionally glib. But that is a small fault. Once again he has challenged the nation's conscience to debate solutions. We are in his debt.

You are what you say

WORDS AND VALUES

Peggy Rosenthal

Oxford, $17.95, $7.95 paper, 250 pp.

Dennis O'Brien

TO PRAISE this brief book as a treasure of common sense will, I fear, have precisely the opposite effect than intended. Who wants to read common sense? Who indeed! But common sense is the meaning, method, and metaphysics of Peggy Rosenthal's eminently readable biographical sketches of some of "the leading figures of our time." These powerful actors in our world are not, however, prime ministers or mullahs, they are the leading words of the day. A mere list will identify all as superstars: individual, feelings, develop, growth, alternative, opinion, relationship. Any thoroughly modern moral mentor should be able to sum up the total of deep life advice in a sentence using the entire array. "In order to grow, individuals must develop their feelings so that by exploring alternative life opinions we may experience meaningful relationships." It is the virtue of Rosenthal's common sense approach to show that this inspiring sentence is the merest mush.

The reason that this sentence is empty is that we do not live in an era of common sense but a time of self-sensing. Self-sensing subtly removes meaning from moral language. This is the argument of *Words and Values*, first published in 1983, now issued in paperback. Rosenthal begins with the word "self" itself. "Self" enters the language first as a reflexive (myself) and becomes a substantive only through a spelling accident about 1300. Once firmly in place, "self" is viewed with considerable suspicion. "Oure own self we sal deny, and folow oure lord god al-myghty" (circa 1400). One would have to say that since its medieval introduction as an editorial mistake, "self" has risen likeunto the famous middle class. Today it is the lord god al-myghty that is denied so that we may follow self through all the improvement books from jogging to T.M.

The fate of the self parallels the fate of value words. If the sense of self is evacuated, our ability to make moral sense disappears. This can be simply illustrated. The problem with "self" and the array of current value terms is that we do not know — or do not wish to know — whether they are givens or goals. Is freedom a given or is there a pedagogy for liberty? Am I already a self or must I become a self? Is being a self pouring out my feelings in meaningful relationships or is it instructing and controlling emotion in order to establish loving commitment? On this fundamental issue our cultural instructors are frequently in a state of deep self-contradiction.

We are to "actualize the self" —

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which seems to call for some sort of concerted effort — but in the same breath we will be told that the self is a most immediate and natural item. It would seem that a simple gush of unrepressed feeling would get the self out of the closet and into actuality. No less an authority than *The International Encyclopedia of Psychiatry, Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Neurology* affirms the at-hand self.

> Man is basically constructive, accepting, creative, spontaneous, open to experience, self-aware, and self-realizing. It is parental, societal, and cultural controls . . . which inhibit the otherwise natural development of self-expression and self-actualization.

If the creative, accepting, etc., self is subject to natural development then there need be no pedagogy for its growth — except the negative task of deconstructing the culture. Thus the moral thrust of "This above all to thine own self be true!" Moral commands to be your (natural) self have the bizarre character of instructing one's gallbladder. Nature will take care of its self without Spinoza.

Following this curious logic of "self," the rest of the power words in our popular moral literature turn out to be road signs to nowhere in particular. Example: we are urged to grow and develop but there is no sense that one might grow like a cancer or develop like a disease. We are asked to fulfill ourselves with no suggestion that there may be better or worse things to be full of. We are invited to express our feelings with the assumption that human feelings are benevolent in essence. What a surprise to Hobbes and St. Augustine.

Rosenthal's book is a treatise on and of common sense and common sense has had a hard time since circa 1400. The cultivation of the individual from the Renaissance through Romanticism leaves little value territory for the common. It would appear that every single self should invent morality and culture *de novo*. He/she who falls into the common morality of parents or society is common indeed. Morality is a matter of genius not of intergenerational connection. Moral discourse is remodeled on the discourse of artistic creation so that each moral individual becomes Gauguin inventing both a painterly and a life style. (This art-historical gloss on the moral life is itself a particular theory of art derived from the Renaissance and is not necessarily the only reading of art — not to mention morality.)

If morality has suffered from being analogized to art it has also suffered from the rise of scientific method. It is a toss-up which is more hostile to a common sense: art or science. If morality is bound up in common sensing across the history of the race, then science may seem to reject the moral code of argument as firmly as any bohemian inventor of a new morality. Many popular readings of the history of science, e.g., Carl Sagan on the tube, see science as a series of surprising discoveries overturning the simplicities of common sense. (The flat earth and all that.) If real thought is ingenious discovery, there is little room for passing on a common sense of how one ought to live a human life.

Does Rosenthal give too much weight to words? People are often light and loose in their talk but it is mere talk and won't we go on living a decent sort of life after

Are the Churches Getting "TOO RADICAL"?

There is a new ferment in the churches today. Recently, 200 top military leaders got together at the National War College, and a high-ranking general stated that, "The greatest challenge to all that we do now comes from within the churches."

The focal point of that challenge seems to be the U.S. Roman Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace. Of course, mainline Protestant churches have issued similar, if less conspicuous, critiques of nuclear weapons and the arms build-up. Significantly, at a time when the country is said to be awash with superpatriotic fervor, Christians are taking their gospel mandate to be peacemakers seriously, and in a way that cannot be dismissed as trendiness.

Also, at a time when wars on poverty are definitely out of vogue, the churches are bucking the spirit of the times and increasingly heeding the words of Christ, that what we have failed to do for the "least of these" we have failed to do for Him. Indeed, the Catholic bishops' pastoral on the economy explicitly embraces the "preferential option for the poor."

Jerry Falwell has attacked that pastoral for coming close to "socialism." If "socialism" is about extending democracy to the economy, he may be right, but the bishops are to be applauded, not excoriated.

The bishops have shocked conventional opinion by calling for "economic democracy," including co-operative ownership of enterprises by workers. But such ideas, however daring in the U.S. context, are as old as the papal encyclicals. It is not surprising, then, that we hear polemicists for privilege decry the Catholic "anti-capitalist" tradition. Nor is it surprising that when Pope John Paul II went to Canada and said that "the needs of the poor must take priority over the desires of the rich, and the rights of workers over the maximization of profits," *Business Week* would quote a Vatican-watcher as saying, "You might call" the pope "a social democrat."

Apologists for the corporate elite and the military have reason to be leery of the churches. But no, we at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW do *not* believe the churches are too radical, so long as that radicalism is rooted in the gospel and not secular ideologies. If the churches are faithful to their Lord, the Bible, and their own traditions, they cannot help but succor the poor, champion the rights of the less advantaged, and try to quiet the gale winds of war. They are compelled to say a decisive "NO!" to the idols of greed, consumerism, and national-interest-above-all.

And more: the NEW OXFORD REVIEW is one of those few voices which does not believe that Christian social concern goes hand-in-hand with doctrinal skepticism and moral relativism. As our columnist John C. Cort (the veteran labor activist) said, if we Christians are truly to sacrifice ourselves on behalf of others, we need "more faith, and less doubt." And our writers — people like J.M. Cameron, Juli Loesch, Richard V. Pierard, and Robert E. Webber — work out of this vision.

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all the books are back on the shelf? Again that depends on whether you are a fan of common sense or not. She notes:

> It's odd maybe to think of words working . . . apart from our awareness and conscious intentions: we're so used to assuming our control of everything . . . We assume that . . . we can simply "say what we mean" . . . That words can mean things apart from what we intend for them, that words say what *they* mean more than what *we* mean is indeed disconcerting.

A firm believer in the almyghty self will not think that there is a common sense which belongs to the words, the meaning is what I intend. I am sure that Rosenthal is correct; language is our *inescapable* common sense of the world. As we talk so shall we be. Rosenthal demonstrates that we are rapidly talking ourselves into a quagmire.

One can appreciate the problems raised by our incoherent leading words by noting former leading figures on the cultural platform: absolute, humility, transcendence, truth, wisdom, wonder, soul, sin, grace, gratitude, and God. Rosenthal points out what is lost by the involuntary retirement of those antique players:

> There's no room for *grace* or *gratitude* in a world where reciprocal and observable *relations* are taken as the whole of what is meaningful and where we think we can have total control. Nor is there any place for *sin* in a positive *self*-image permitting only good *feelings* . . .

I fear that in a time when the secret of the good life is discovered weekly like the elusive quark, *Words and Values* will just not have the pizzazz of the latest vegetarian diet book. The more's the pity. This work is better than a profound discovery, it displays the common heart and sense of humanity.

> *No matter which role is ours in this interplay of social power we can find ourselves called to account. If I am in authority, I can be expected to explain my use of power; if I am obedient, I must be able to justify this as an adult act.*
> —James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead
> *Seasons of Strength*

Mid-life meditation

SEASONS OF STRENGTH:

NEW VISIONS OF ADULT CHRISTIAN MATURING

James D. Whitehead & Evelyn Eaton Whitehead

Doubleday, $13.95, 215 pp.

Dolores R. Leckey

THIS YEAR Christmas brought home to me, quite literally, the sure signs that I am one of those people whom developmentalists describe as "a midlifer" or a "middlescent woman," or in the religious/devotional literature, "a mature Christian." The children came home; that's how I know my place on this particular bell curve. Now in their twenties, my sons and daughters brought to the Christmas fireside their different worlds of aesthetics, of reason, of child-rearing, of what's-the-meaning-of-life-anyway questions, and we tried to accommodate all of this to my world of ordered, dependable home. Let me tell you, it takes effort and energy to try to adjust the fit. And as the developmentalists will explain, this comes at a time when energy is at a premium. It's understandable, then, that I welcome help in any form. That's why I read books about Jungian functions and changing prayer patterns, or about the special bonding between grandparents and grandchildren, or the research on mid-life creativity.

James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, known and respected for joining development psychology and theological reflection, have produced a new book, *Seasons of Strength: New Visions of Adult Christian Maturing* the title of which suggests some fresh insight into the reality of Christian faith as it is tested and "seasoned." Readers of the Whiteheads' earlier works will be on familiar ground with their latest contribution. The themes of intimacy, personal vocation, discipleship and stewardship, generativity and power which are so central in their *Christian Life Patterns* (Doubleday, 1979) reappear in *Seasons of Strength*. True, in *Seasons*, there is a bit more elaboration, an intentional focus on maturity vs. young adult development, and often a more forceful presentation of the material. Nevertheless, one quickly senses (if acquainted with the Whiteheads' books) that the authors have said this all before, in some cases word for word. Because of this, there is the temptation to leave *Seasons of Strength* to those uninitiated in the Whiteheads' premises and methodology. That would be a mistake. Perseverance uncovers something original and something important for our life as contemporary Catholic Christians. In fact there are several worthwhile points to be discovered.

One is a useful typology which the authors have developed in order to speak about the complex issues surrounding power — the "faces of power" they call it. The Whiteheads understand well that each of us is responsible for his/her use and abuse of the faces of personal power, and that some others of us ought to be accountable for the social power which we exercise. This is not a matter to be left free-floating around the unconscious. It's a topic that needs to be squarely faced, and *Seasons of Strength* does that.

The chapter on authority and obedience might well be required reading for all church ministers, lay, ordained, and religiously vowed. The authors show that authority and power are clearly linked. "Authorities — persons, laws, customs — arise from our judgments about power. . . . This is not to suggest that it [authority] is simply arbitrary and subjective. It does remind us that we are participants in determining the pattern of authority in our civic and religious lives." That old-fashioned term, obedience, is reintroduced into the conversation on au-

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thority. Obedience is, we read in *Seasons*, "the proper response to legitimate authority." But it is not only that. It is a movement of solidarity; it is an act of interdependence; it is "an adult strength." There is, I believe, wisdom in the following: "All of us who are attempting to sustain relationships of some depth — whether in marriage or ministry teams or religious life — know how necessary is the strength of obedience. Without the willingness to modify personal behavior it is difficult to deal with change as our relationship grows. Without flexibility it is hard to respond creatively as our shared commitments take new shape." Now that's the stuff of mid-life meditation. It could even sustain one through any number of Christmas-week dinners with adult children.

There remain a few puzzlements about *Seasons of Strength*. For example, why include the previously published chapter on homosexual holiness? It's a topic worthy of discussion, surely, but the chapter is dropped in, a visitor from another book, one that borders on intrusion. Sexuality is an important issue in midlife, and I wonder why the authors did not devote a new chapter to the fullness of the subject.

I wonder, too, about the borderline stridency that surfaces when the authors point to the church's attitudes, limitations, and mistakes. Paternalism, authoritarianism, and sexism exist in the church and need to be exposed for the health of the body. But these "isms" exist not only in *them*, but in *us* as well. *We* are the church, in the bad times and in the good. Why not "befriend" the church, to use one of the Whiteheads' memorable terms?

Quintessential adult educators, the Whiteheads tap into the experience of those they're working with, whether they be workshop participants or readers. For the latter this takes the form of reflection questions, intended to link social science theory and theological and pastoral analyses to the bottom line of people's experience. The questions at the end of each chapter of *Seasons of Strength* could certainly launch some Lenten reflections.

REVIEWERS

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Correspondence

(Continued from page 130)

to match Michael Novak's as we enter with joy into the land of guru megabucks. Also, as Novakian gurus, we will be invited by Bishop Imesch to testify on the writing of the pastoral on women just as Michael was invited to witness to the bishops' committee drafting the pastoral on the economy . . . even while he was preparing a preemptive strike against the pastoral. Unless there is a double stand-

Communities of Faith

. . . In the late sixties, the church rose to the challenge of a social action congress in 1967 to "go to the barrios," the rural sector of Philippine society. The barrios constitute the most depressed areas of an already depressed country, the most neglected too as far as the church's ministrations were concerned. In those dioceses where the challenge was seriously considered, church social actions programs, targeted at greater economic development and more political freedom for farming folk, began to have great impact. With the advent of martial law, however, many of these programs, those aimed at organizing farm labor especially, came to an abrupt stop.

We started to cast about for other ways of uniting our people, the poor rural folk in particular, for action on their own behalf against the many social ills that had plagued their lives long before martial law and gotten worse with it. We never were able to come up with an organization that would take the place of unions and associations emasculated by martial law, but ironically in the very process of searching, we began to develop much faster something we had been aiming for since the early seventies — a more participative church. It took some time for the realization to sink in that we had the answer all along in that kind of church. And this new form of church was epitomized by the Basic Christian Communities. . . .

Francisco F. Claver, S.J. *Commonweal*, March 9, 1984

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ard when the subject is women — and that is just unthinkable — we will be there.

Now we leave to go back searching the editorial for even one tear shed for the twenty-four nuns. That will keep us busy.

MARJORIE REILEY MAGUIRE
DANIEL C. MAGUIRE

The author replies

It is not easy to respond to a letter like the Maguires' directly and dispassionately. They have chosen to attack my editorial with sarcasm, exaggeration, patches of self-pity, misleading references to private editorial business, and a flurry of unrelated complaints.

One would hardly suspect, from their account, that the main point of my piece was to criticize, in unmistakable terms, the action of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes against the signers of the October 7 *New York Times* ad. One might not even realize that far from "ordaining" the Maguires as "gurus," I never mentioned that word. It is entirely their own invention, introduced here to exaggerate and caricature my criticism of them.

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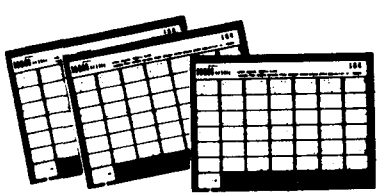

I will do my best to disentangle and to reply to what I believe are the major questions behind the Maguires' indignation. First let me dispatch some of the minor ones. The charge they make "secondly," for example, is that I "do not enter into ecumenism when the subject is abortion." I have no idea on what grounds they say this. While I believe they are somewhat precipitous in declaring Professor Harrison's book "the authoritative work on abortion decisions in a Christian context," the fact remains that the book was thoughtfully reviewed in these pages and I myself appeared with its author to discuss it on a panel at New York's Riverside Church.

The answer to their third point is simply that my editorial could not discuss everything. Likewise the editorial did not attempt to evaluate CFFC (their fifth point) or recapitulate the entire abortion debate (their sixth point).

Why didn't I name the handful of non-signing theologians with whom I spoke (the Maguires' fourth point)? The explanation is not mysterious. Some of these views were offered me in conversations before the SCRIS action had blown this whole issue up. I was not seeking opinions "for attribution" for the simple reason that I then had no idea I would be writing on the subject. Other theologians, with whom I spoke in the wake of the SCRIS action, asked not to be quoted by name *precisely because they did not want their names or authority used to complicate the situation of the sisters against whom SCRIS had acted.*

The Maguires' final complaint is similarly groundless. The editorial did not "imply" anything about whether or not the signers gave permission for "public dissemination" of their signatures. Rather it *stated* plainly that some individuals signed it "months earlier, long before its sponsors decided to publish it in the *Times*." The Maguires do not challenge this. In any case, the observation was made to underline the unreasonableness of SCRIS's action.

So much for the minor issues. What, then, are the major ones? I believe they are three: (1) my criticism of the Maguires; (2) my criticism of the *New York Times* ad and its sponsors; (3) what is implied in the very fact that my editorial criticized *both* the ad and the Vatican's unjustified response to it. Let us see:

1. My criticism of the Maguires was, in actuality, rather limited, a fact toward which the Maguires seem to be of divided mind. At moments they would minimize their importance in the Catholic abortion debate. At other moments, they apparently believe that *Commonweal* editorial policy turns on whether their own particular proposals or manuscripts are accepted or rejected here.

Meantime, I have evidently enraged them by simply pointing out, even in a passing way, exactly what they are doing. Certainly I do not believe, nor did my editorial claim, that the Maguires approve of "all abortion decision-making in the world." Who possibly could? But for some time now, they have systematically striven to maximize the uncertainty about Catholic teaching regarding abortion — to the point where that teaching is rendered easily compatible even with radical pro-choice positions. Perhaps from some future vantage point, they will be shown to have been right; we would all do well to keep such a possibility in mind. For now, however, I think my only crime was candor.

2. My criticism of the ad did not, as the Maguires claim, consist of "vague and unsubstantiated charges." I offered specific reasons why, in my view and that of several theologians, the ad, despite its minimal wording, "gave a distinctly false impression" of a far wider diversity of Catholic moral thinking on abortion than actually exists. These reasons had to do with context and with what the ad omitted saying as well as with what it did say. The Maguires do not reply to any of these reasons, preferring instead to label them all "guesswork." My "guesswork," in fact, consisted of

(a) applying to the ad the same standards of reasonable interpretation that one would apply to any "political" ad, a genre notorious for sending messages based on context, emphasis, and selective data; and

(b) assuming that Catholics for a Free Choice, an experienced, professional lobbying operation, knew exactly what

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kind of impression they were creating.

When Mr. Reagan attends an election-season spaghetti dinner in a New Jersey parish, do the Maguires conclude that he is out to woo Catholic voters? Might they reach that conclusion regardless of whatever innocuous explanation the White House issues? Would this be untoward "guesswork"?

3. By accompanying my strong criticism of the Vatican's action (to which the Maguires never refer) with frank criticism of the ad, I indicated my conviction that Catholics of a liberal outlook should chart a course on the abortion issue that is independent of both the existing pro-life and pro-choice options. This, I believe, is what, as much as anything, irks and frustrates the Maguires. Can liberal Catholics reject as unwise and unworkable the pro-life movement's insistence on legally outlawing virtually all abortions, and yet vigorously oppose abortion-on-demand and the *moral* legitimacy that *Roe v. Wade* has lent abortion? Can we honestly and rigorously pursue the many serious questions that remain about the morality of abortion — and, yes, about the church's official teachings, too — and yet not allow this very pursuit to be used by lobbyists to minimize the weight of Catholic tradition or to create the impression that nothing much separates that teaching from, say, Beverly Harrison's? Can we resist moral and legal shortcuts from whatever source, including the *Zeitgeist* — and resist sheer paralysis as well?

The Maguires do not see the issue in these terms. They believe that liberal Catholics ought to sign up wholeheartedly with the pro-choice defenders of *Roe v. Wade*. In this letter, as in a number of other recent writings, they manifest considerable irritation at the unwillingness of these Catholics, including liberal publications like *Commonweal*, *America*, and the *National Catholic Reporter*, to fall into line.

It is in that light that I read the sarcasm marking their early paragraphs and their attempt to discredit the very idea that serious thinkers ("brave anonymous theologians . . . your approved theologians") could refuse to follow their lead. They suggest that only some dogmatic arrogance, some obtuse refusal to recognize the gifts of the "co-deans of Catholic feminist scholarship" or the "best and the brightest in the American church," some disdain for the "moral maturity of women and their right to be heard," some snobbish exclusion of theologians not on the East Coast, some allergy to ecumenism could account for criticism of their ad.

In fact, my editorial carefully noted that "a number of outstanding feminist theologians, including contributors to this journal, were among signers" of the ad. But notwithstanding my respect for many of these individuals, I think it would be a tragic error to accept the ticket to a bandwagon that the Maguires proffer. And bullying is not attractive, whether it comes from them or from SCRIS.

PETER STEINFELS

Religion & socialism

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: It is rare these days that we can celebrate the goodness of our fellow travelers on the "Way." Harry Fleischman's article on Norman Thomas [November 30], marking the centennial of his birth, is just such a tribute. In addition, when the U.S. Catholic bishops are branded as socialists and when their presentation of Catholic social teaching is criticized for its inapplicability to the unique American situation, it is refreshing to be reminded of our own humanistic tradition of American socialism.

Both of these reminders are not insignificant. Considering the fact that most religious Americans equate socialism with "communistic atheism," the discussion about just alternatives to the present injustices of our system is often hamstrung before any serious interchange can take place in the popular imagination.

Some would want to "red-bait" the incorporation of even a "soft" version of liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor" into the bishops' pastoral letter.

The theological struggles and ponderings of Norman Thomas reveal not only the implicit theological base of his own humanistic socialism, but unveil to a listening and attentive church the possibilities for pursuit of its vocation to evangelical service and justice in the world.

RALPH DEL COLLE
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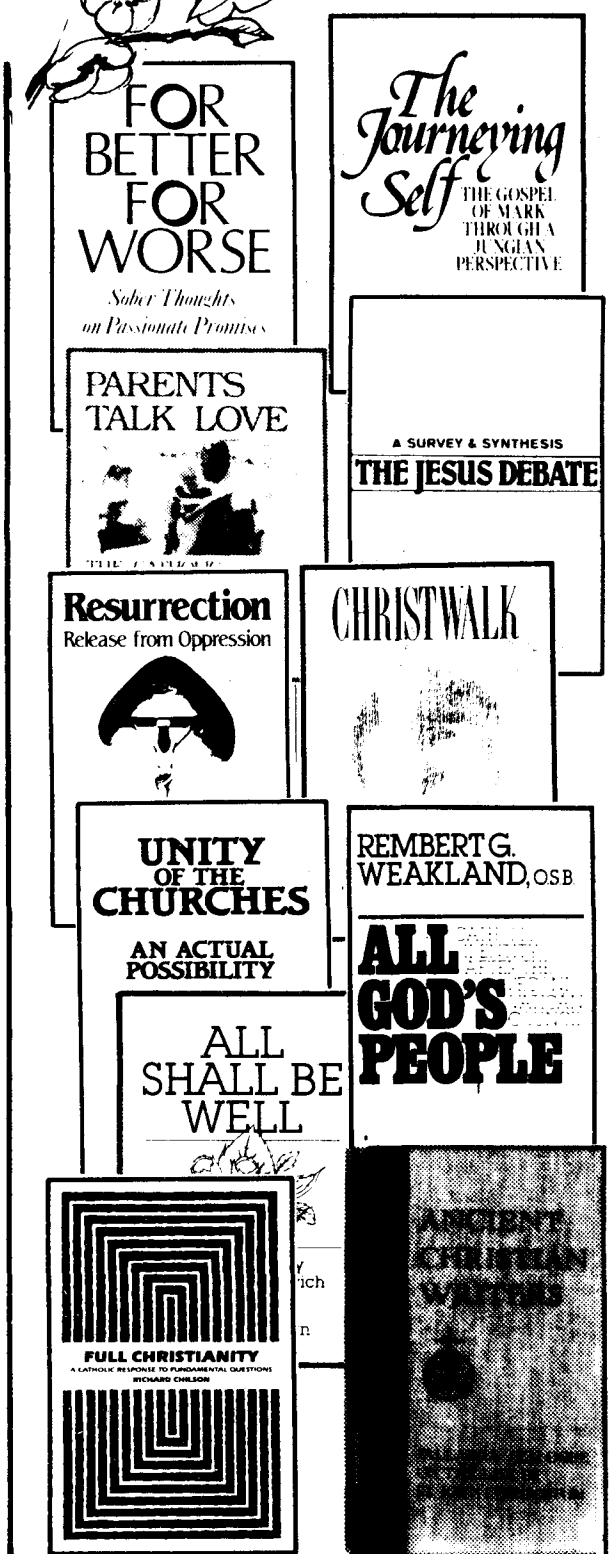

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